A Study of Spiritualism in the Life and Work of Elizabeth Barrett Browning

by Christina Bernadette Thérèse Hill

Submitted in fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Birmingham.

October 1977

Synopsis

This thesis studies the subject of Spiritualism in relation to the life and work of Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

The Introduction refers briefly to the controversial phenomenon of Spiritualism in the nineteenth century, and the problems relating to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's belief and active interest in the subject. Chapter One traces the rise of Spiritualism in Victorian times from its ancient origins, concentrating on the life of the famous medium D. D. Home. Chapters Two and Three describe Elizabeth Barrett Browning's experience of the phenomenon, and the following four chapters discuss her poetry within the context of her spiritualistic beliefs. Although she rarely referred specifically to Spiritualism in her work, she was much preoccupied with death, the notion of immortality, the nature and condition of the human soul and of the spiritual life; Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven do not seek to detect spiritualistic elements in all of her poems, but to explore her handling of these related themes, and her interest in Death as an important thematic element in her work, and as a source of much of her imagery.

Contents

Introduction

The subject of Spiritualism, which saw its rise in modern times in the middle of the nineteenth century, was a controversial one at that time in scientific, religious and social circles. Summarising briefly, there was considerable interest in new areas of scientific investigation, coupled with a great interest in occult subjects such as Mesmerism, clairvoyance and Spiritualism, at a time when orthodox religious faith was being undermined by the aforementioned scientific advancements, and by the assertions of new Biblical criticism. The latter tended to have the effect of making the more sensationally supernatural a refuge for many from an increasingly materialistic society which seemed to be losing traditional faith while finding no adequate replacement for it. In a world of spreading industrialisation, a world less able to accept traditional Christian explanations in the light of new discoveries, many lost their religious faith and turned to the fascinating mysteries of the occult. Others tended to see their faith confirmed or renewed by the 'evidence' of supernatural theories which the occult seemed to afford. Still others saw in new areas of investigation such as the occult, further discoveries which would lead on to human enlightenment and advancement. However, the hopes and expectations of many spiritualists were frequently dashed by the exposure of countless fraudulent mediums who degraded the lofty spiritual aspirations of the movement, by fradulence, deception, and the exploitation of the gullible or the distressed bereaved.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861) provides an interesting example of an intelligent, though at times curiously indiscriminating believer. This thesis attempts both to describe and to account for the strong belief she retained to the end of her life. Of particular

interest is her involvement with the notorious medium D. D. Home, whom Browning, contrastingly, seems to have disliked intensely. Possible reasons for this antipathy are proffered. The latter section of the thesis concerns Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetry. Although Spiritualism played an important role in her life she seems rarely to have introduced the subject explicitly, into her creative work. On the other hand, death is frequently a thematic preoccupation in her poems, while the subject often provides the source for much of her symbolism and imagery. Other related subjects - the after-life, immortality, spiritual entities, human spirituality, the human soul and spirit - are areas which are commonly introduced into her poems.

The following works are frequently referred to, and are cited in the text by the mention of the author's surname alone:

Gardner B. Taplin, The Life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning (London, 1957).

Katharine H. Porter, Through a Glass Darkly, Spiritualism in the Browning Circle (University of Kansas; Laurence, Kansas, 1958).

Additional biographical material in the footnotes is derived from the following sources :-

The Dictionary of National Biography, ed. Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee (London, 1917), twenty vols.

Webster's Biographical Dictionary (Boston, Mass., 1972).

The Dictionary of Universal Biography, ed. Albert M. Hyamson (London, 1966).

The Dictionary of American Biography, ed. Dumas Malone (London, 1933) twenty-two vols.

Burke's Peerage, Baronetage and Knightage, ed. L. G. Pine (London, 1959).

Details of all other works consulted, together with additional material relevant to the text, will be found in footnotes at the end of each chapter.

It will be apparent that both Taplin and Porter quote from the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of Browning correspondence in the New York Public Library. I was unable to obtain permission to read a micro-film or photo-copy of this collection. It will become clear that this unpublished collection would have proved of great value in the present discussion. Parts of letters quoted by Taplin and Porter are, however, included where appropriate, and the secondary source is indicated in each case.

Use was made in the study of the collections of Browning correspondence and manuscripts in the library of Yale University, and in that of Harvard University.

Throughout, all quotations from Elizabeth's poetry are taken from The Complete Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, ed. Charlotte Porter and Helen A. Clarke (New York, 1900, reissued 1973). This would appear to be the most complete and the most scholarly edition to date. Poems are cited by line references and, in the case of Aurora Leigh, by book and line references.

Chapter One: A Short History of Spiritualism, and the Life of D.D. Home (1833-1886)

In this chapter an attempt will be made to describe the history of the phenomenon known as 'Spiritualism', the origins of which can be traced from at least as early as Old Testament times. An account will be given of the new developments in Spiritualism which occurred in the mid-nineteenth century, when it found its most successful and reknowned advocate in the medium, D. D. Home, who played a major role in the interest of many well-known literary and other figures in the phenomenon - including Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

The term 'Spiritualism' requires definition. First, it needs to be distinguished from the concept of 'Spiritism', which is the doctrine that the human spirit exists as a distinct entity from matter or the material, or that 'spirit' is the only reality (a belief entirely opposite to that of 'materialism'). Secondly, 'Spiritualism' needs to be separated from the more general notion of 'Spirituality', which implies any spiritual quality, spiritual awareness or consciousness. 'Spiritualism' implies the belief that the human individual has a spirit which survives physical or bodily death, and that this spirit can communicate with this world. During the nineteenth century it came to be believed by spiritualists that this communication was possible by means of the various techniques which were employed at a 'séance' - that is, that the spirits could communicate with the 'sitters' or investigators, by means of rapping upon tables, guiding writing implements held by the sitters to produce messages, and, later, by speaking directly to the assembled company through the voice-box of the entranced 'medium'.

The rise of Spiritualism in recent times historically speaking can be ascribed to a particular time and place, when at Hydesville,

New York State, in 1848, the first so-called spirit'raps' occurred. However, the phenomenon of supposed spirit-communication is far older than this - as old, probably, as notions of the spirit itself and the concept of immortality. Most historians cite as an early example of a 'disembodied spirit' communicating with a sitter through a 'medium', the instance in I Samuel, Ch. 28, vv 7-25, when, through the mediumship of the Witch of Endor, Saul is described as having been able to see the spirit of the dead prophet Samuel, and to speak to him(1).

Indeed, the latter example relates more closely to the phenomenon of 'necromancy' which could therefore be said to have anticipated Spiritualism to a large degree. However, the difference between so-called 'Necromancy' and its successor, Spiritualism, lies in the fact that whereas the spiritualist aimed to establish contact with the spirit, his predecessor, the necromancer, had pretentions, it would seem, towards literally raising the dead. Grillot de Givry sees necromancy as part of the practice of some medieval witches:

> Necromancy was most assiduously practised in the Middle Ages. It consisted either in making the dead appear or, if they were recalcitrant, in exhuming corpses and examining them... In Spain necromancy was taught at Seville, Toledo, and Salamanca, in deep caverns which were at length walled up by Isabella the Catholic. The witches of those parts lay under the additional imputation of eating human flesh (2).

It would appear, therefore, that these so-called 'necromancers' in fact retrieved interred corpses for use in diabolic rites and grisly repasts, and that they were somehow attributed by primitive

societies with the power of 'raising the dead' in order to consult them about the future. Two such notions - that of exhumation and of divination - could be said to be combined too in the Roman practice of haruspicy or inspecting the entrails of slaughtered animals as a means of foretelling the future.

However, de Givry sees both Dr. John Dee (1527-1608), astrologer to Elizabeth I, and his fellow 'magician' Edward Kelley (1555-1595), as necromancers in that they had pretensions towards consulting 'spirits' by raising dead persons from the grave (de Givry, p. 170). De Givry points out that Spiritualism 'replaced' Necromancy in the nineteenth century (de Givry, p. 173), and he describes Spiritualism as "drawing-room necromancy" (ibid).

Other theories and practices, apart from Necromancy, also influenced the continuing tradition which was later to manifest itself in the form of Spiritualism as we know it. Among these was the school of thought known as 'Swedenborgianism'. A Swedish scientist and philosopher, Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), had a profound influence upon the thinking of later spiritualists who, as we shall see, avidly read his writings and discussed his theories. Swedenborg's aim was to discover the nature of the soul and spirit by anatomical study. In his researches, he made important discoveries concerning the brain and its relationship to respiration and to heart action. Progressively his interests became increasingly spiritual. He had visionary and dream experiences, believed himself to have conversed with angels and spirits, and believed that he had been endowed with a Divine mission to teach his spiritual revelations to others. His successors held a number of orthodox Christian beliefs, and, as far as the Swedenborgians' thinking on the human spirit was concerned, they believed in a form of purgatory

whereby the spirit is 'cleansed', and held the view that the resurrection will be of a spiritual, not a material body.

It should also be remembered, of course, that the fundamental belief of spiritualists - the belief in the human soul's survival of bodily death - was and is a basic precept of orthodox Christianity which has taught that doctrine throughout its history. Indeed, many spiritualists then and now, saw and see themselves as 'Christians', and speak of 'Christian Spiritualism' and 'Spiritualist churches'. Nevertheless, although it is true that many Christians in the nineteenth century regarded the practices of spiritualists as abominable and diabolic (as we shall see, D. D. Home was expelled by his local religious community), others, including Elizabeth Barrett Browning, were able to reconcile their Christian and spiritualist beliefs. More will be said of this in Chapter Three. For the moment however, it is sufficient to say that the spiritualists of Europe and America were borrowing their belief in the human soul's immortality from the Christian tradition within which they had been born.

Another important factor in the development of Spiritualism during the nineteenth century was the contemporary interest in all forms of occultism - astrology, alchemy and magic, Mesmerism, phrenology, ghosts and hauntings. This was probably due to two basic reasons, the desire for knowledge and the contemporary climate of increasing materialism. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries great importance was attached to the increasing number of new scientific developments, inventions and discoveries, which subsequently received considerable attention. In this climate of extensive scientific interest, all new phenomena attracted great interest and this interest, being based only on partial knowledge, frequently lacked discrimination.

Indicative of this was the Royal Society's frequent consideration of new discoveries, bogus and genuine alike. In this atmosphere, therefore, it was to be expected that phenomena such as Mesmerism were the preserve of medical authorities and doctors, and that Spiritualism was of interest to those knowledgeable in biology and electricity. Indeed, it is still the practice of psychic investigators to base their researches less upon their philosophical and theological knowledge, and more upon the insights to be gained through scientific methods and the use of scientific devices. Secondly, in this increasingly scientific age, orthodox religious faith was being shaken by the new discoveries, and by new Biblical criticism. In a developing industrial society, the sensationally supernatural was resorted to by many as a refuge from the encroaching materialism of the age. In this increasingly industrial and materialistic society, later influenced by evolutionary theories which appeared to contradict the Biblical account of creation, and by archaeological excavation, which threw Biblical narrative into a new (and modified) perspective, in this society many lost their religious faith with the inability of Christianity to reconcile itself to the new discoveries and developments, so that many people resorted to the mysterious fascination of occultism. From a more positive stand-point, many - including some spiritualists - believed that the new 'truths' revealed by exploring the occult would lead on to human advancement and enlightenment.

It is evident, therefore, that the interest in Spiritualism which occurred in the nineteenth century also related to the contemporary interest in various branches of the occult. It is probably more profitable to see Spiritualism as part of the general 'occult' interest, than to assert that Spiritualism developed specifically from other phenomena such as Mesmerism and Swedenborgianism, an emphasis argued by Katherine H. Porter (Porter, p. 8).

However, as Joseph Crehan asserts "... modern Spiritualism only dates from the year 1848. Both in America and England the anniversary from time to time has been commemorated with great solemnity"(3). As has already been stated, the events occurred at Hydesville, New York State, in January 1848, in the farmhouse home of the Fox family:

> They were troubled ... with noises, which in January 1848 assumed the definite character of knockings, like that of a hammer. Two children, since so famous as the Misses Fox, felt something heavy ... lie on their feet, when in bed, and one of them felt as if a cold hand were passed over her face. The knockings went on increasing in violence ...(4)

Lee proceeds to describe how the Fox sisters, Maggie and Katie (the first 'mediums' of modern times), succeeded in establishing contact with the 'spirits' who, it transpired, were responsible for these knockings. The sisters' means of communication was to knock in answer to the spirits, who would thus "reply by rapping, on repetition of the letters of the alphabet, to questions put to them" (Lee, II, 142). This was the origin of so-called 'spirit-rapping'.

The Fox rappings purported to be messages from a pedlar murdered in the house many years earlier and, indeed, upon further investigation bones were discovered beneath the house. However, the immediate effect of the Fox sisters' mediumship was that rappings were heard all over the country upon ceilings, tables and chairs, and mediums claimed contact with the so-called 'spirit-world' similar to that of the Foxes. Before long, other spiritualistic phenomena developed: furniture was unaccountably moved and raised, and mediums began to produce messages and drawings which, they claimed, were the result of spirits guiding

the pens held by the mediums. Each new development in the movement was greeted with enthusiasm by believers and others interested in the phenomena.

For a long time the Foxes retained their prominent position in the movement. As Horace Wyndham states, the sisters were asked "to exhibit their qualities in New York"(5) before a company including the poet William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878), the novelist Fenimoore Cooper (1789-1851), Horace Greeley, the editor (1811-1872), and the notable statesman and historian George Bancroft (1800-1851).

It was not long before authoritative investigation was applied to the Fox sisters' mediumship. Three medical professors from the University of Buffalo studied the Foxes, with disturbing results:

> They were convinced that the noises came from the deliberate dislocation and replacement of the knee joint; there were no raps when Professor Lee held the knees at the side .., or when the girls' legs were outstretched, the feet not touching(6).

However, this suspicion on the part of scientific investigators did little to lessen the increasing popularity of Spiritualism at the time, or to reduce the frequency of the phenomena produced. Indeed, even the eventual confessions of the Fox sisters, forty years later, did little to weaken the progress of the movement in the late nineteenth century. As Joseph Crehan describes:

> On October 21, 1888, the two sisters, who sometime previously had contracted habits of intemperance, were persuaded ... to attend an anti-Spiritualist meeting ... in New York. There Maggie, in the presence of her sister, read aloud a short statement ... (Crehan, p. 14).

The statement was a denounciation of Spiritualism as a total falsehood; Father Crehan's account continues that the statement:

> ... was followed by what purported to be a demonstration that the medium by cracking her toe- or ankle-joints was able to produce raps which could be heard all over the room ... a year later Maggie, in the presence of witnesses, formally retracted all that she had said (ibid).

Father Crehan justifiably declares that any confession or subsequent retraction by the inebriate sisters cannot be produced as evidence either for or against the validity of spiritualistic phenomena. Although the Fox sisters were probably bogus mediums, and were the originators of the movement, their fradulence neither implies that all mediums were cheats, nor serves to explain away the basis of so-called psychic phenomena generally. Besides, by the time of Maggie's retraction, many others had claimed mediumistic gifts and established themselves as leading figures in the Spiritualist movement. As Robert Pearsall says, these successors to the Foxes dismissed Maggie's confession, asserting that she "did not know what she was saying, that she was sodden with drink, that her outbursts meant nothing" (Pearsall, p.56). As proof of the failure of the Fox confession in undermining the movement, Pearsall asserts that "the séances went on" (ibid).

Spiritualism reached England in 1852, when a Mrs. Hayden, wife of a New England journalist, arrived in this country and produced the first 'spirit rappings' here. She was an immediate success. When invited to hold a gathering at Cavendish Square, a number of celebrities attended, including Catherine Crowe, Robert Chambers and Mrs. Milner-Gibson (7). Mrs. Hayden's speciality was spirit-rappings, which she demonstrated before selected audiences in the fashionable homes

of high-society. She returned to America in 1853, by which time the seeds of Spiritualism had been sewn in European society, and other mediums arose to succeed her.

Among these were Jennie Homer, whose activities included having her hands tied and then covered with a handkerchief; when the latter was removed, a ring was found to have been fastened around the medium's wrist, by 'spirit hands' (Wyndham, p. 20). Other famous mediums included Mrs. Gerald Massey, and Mrs. Roberts (ibid).

By far the most famous, successful and controversial of the mediums of the nineteenth century, however, was Daniel Douglas (or Dunglas) Home, who also came to England from America. Home was born near Edinburgh in 1833, and was sent to live with an aunt in America in 1842. Although in fact born with the surname 'Hume', he claimed to have connections with the aristocratic Scottish family of Home, and later adopted their form of spelling the name. Horace Wyndham, generally hostile towards home, rejects Home's claims of noble ancestry as being totally without foundation (Wyndham, pp. 29-30). However, it does seem that Home's father, William Hume, was the illegitimate son of Alexander 10th Earl of Home.

Home played an important role in the Brownings' spiritualistic experiences. To a large extent it is upon his credibility that Elizabeth's belief in, and Browning's hostility towards the phenomenon, depend. Moreover, Home's reputation is one of the most interesting aspects of his biography, because he was the only medium of the age never to be exposed or caught in the act of fraudulence. For these reasons, his interesting history is worth discussion.

As a child in America, Home claimed to have experienced visions, and when, like the Foxes, 'spirit rappings' occurred in his presence too, he was expelled from home by his aunt, and ostracised by the

local religious community (8). At this time, Home was of the opinion that the phenomena were of Divine origin, and he therefore dedicated himself to God's service. Furniture began to be moved about in his presence, and many instances of 'clairvoyant trance' ensued (Incidents, p. 7).

Home was introduced to Swedenborgianism by Professor George Bush (Incidents, pp. 16-17). In 1852 he moved to Massachusetts. It seems that from this time on, Home acted as a 'professional medium', although, as he asserted (it seems correctly): "I was not a paid medium" (Incidents, p. 36). His practice was to stay as a house-guest with families interested in Spiritualism, and eventually to move on to others' hospitality. Many phenomena occurred when he stayed with people in this way - for example, during his sojourn with the Elmer family (Incidents, p. 21).

Home was investigated by a group of Harvard professors and found to be innocent of all imposture and fraudulence (Incidents, pp. 22-23). Not long after, he first encountered the phenomenon of so-called 'spirit-lights' (Incidents, p. 26). He proceeded to New York, where he survived another investigation (Incidents, p. 28), and before long he was being levitated during séances, it seems (Incidents, p. 36), and 'spirit-music' was heard in his presence (Incidents, pp. 40-41).

In 1853, when asleep one night, Home had a vision of the after-life, which he later expounded as the state whereby the individual leaves the physical body for the spirit body (Incidents, pp. 43-47). The following year it was found that he himself had a diseased lung, but was assured by spirits that he was not to die yet (Incidents, p. 49).

In March 1855 Home arrived in England and held his first séance in London, in the presence of Lord Brougham and Sir David Brewster (Incidents, p. 63). Soon after, he proceeded to Ealing as the guest

of the Rymer family (Incidents, p. 64). It was here that he was visited by the Brownings, and that the notorious 'Ealing séance' occurred in their presence. These events will be discussed in Chapter Two.

Home's séances tended to follow a set pattern. They usually occurred in slightly darkened rooms in the presence of an assembled company, preferably no more than a dozen in number. Table-rapping would occur, then sometimes the table would be raised, and other articles of furniture in the room moved. Frequently the 'spirits' would spell out messages, using an alphabet placed on the table, by rapping out as the medium indicated the appropriate letters. 'Spirit hands' would appear around the table, and would sometimes touch the sitters. The spirits would also 'play' various instruments - the accordion, the guitar - the medium holding the instrument, and bells would be invisibly lifted and rung. Articles such as wreaths, posies, gloves or rings from the fingers of the sitters would be passed around the séance-table. Sometimes the medium would become entranced, and the 'spirits' would utter, through him, their messages to the assembled sitters. Sometimes the medium would be levitated, and would apparently rise up to the ceiling. In later years Home demonstrated other phenomena - the ability, under the influence of 'spirits', to carry live coals in his hands, or place his head in the fire, while remaining unburned, and the power of elongating his body (9).

While at Ealing, Home was visited by a number of literary celebrities. Among these were the novelist Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873), and his son Robert Lytton (1831-1891).

Bulwer-Lytton was a student of the occult, interested in a number of allied phenomena. As Robert Lee Wolff states, Bulwer-Lytton's interests included "astrology, alchemy, mesmerism, clairvoyance, hypnotism, spiritualism and magic; he investigated them all at first

hand, and wrote about them all" (10).

Robert Lytton wrote to Mrs. Browning of one of Home's séances which he and his father attended at the Rymers' in July 1855. A variety of phenomena occured, including spirit-raps, the playing of an accordion, table-levitation, and the materialisation of 'spirit-hands'. The climax of the séance concerned the manifestation of extraordinary strength on the part of the 'spirits' present. Robert Lytton wrote:

> My legs, when sitting at the table, were seized under the table by a very powerful grasp - everybody's hands being at that time <u>on</u> the table; and on looking under it, I cd discover nothing ... (11).

The most astonished of the sitters on this occasion, however, must surely have been Lytton's father, Bulwer-Lytton himself. Robert Lytton continued:

> My father was seized by a hand so strong that, believing it to be a bona fide human hand and determined to trace it to its owner, he retained firm hold of it, and was dragged half under the table, when it broke from his hold. At the same moment the room was filled with sounds so loud and violent (as) to shake everything. A very strong man cd hardly have produced them ... (Owen Meredith, <u>Letters</u>, p. 110-111).

It is tempting to attribute these events to antics on the part of Home himself, but it is questionable that the weak consumptive medium was capable of the physical strength possessed by the 'spirits' which Lytton's account implies.

Bulwer-Lytton was to receive further astonishing attention from the 'spirits'. At one of Home's Ealing séances, rappings occurred and, by means of the alphabet, a spirit spelled out the message: "I am the spirit who influenced you to write Z----!" (<u>Incidents</u>, p. 65).

'Z---' clearly referred to Bulwer-Lytton's novel Zamoni (12). It seems that Bulwer-Lytton asked the spirit if he could have further proof of its presence at the séance, to which the spirit suggested that its hand would prove its existence and, upon Bulwer-Lytton's acceptance of that as valid proof, the spirit shocked him by grasping him beneath the table (Incidents, p. 65). However, it proved its good will by telling him that it wished him to believe in ... at which point it clarified its meaning by lifting a cardboard cross from a table in the room, and putting it into his hand (ibid). One would note that the presence of this cardboard cross on a nearby table seems suspiciously convenient to the 'spirit's' purpose.

Indeed, Jean Burton asserts that Bulwer-Lytton "felt chiefly exasperation at having manifestations so trivial forced on his notice" (13). However, Madame Home asserted that Bulwer-Lytton "was perfectly convinced of the genuineness of the phenomena... but too timid to avow his convictions publicly" (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, p. 50). She cited as evidence of Bulwer-Lytton's continuing interest and belief in Home, the many séances which were held at Knebworth, the Lytton seat, in 1855 and 1860-1 (ibid). Unfortunately, it seems that as far as these séances were concerned, "Mr. Home kept no record of them; and Lord Lytton, though he probably preserved one, never published it" (ibid).

However, in addition to the Knebworth séances, it seems that Bulwer-Lytton was sufficiently intrigued by Home to base one of the characters of his novel A Strange Story (1862), upon the medium: Horace Wyndham states that Home was "a model for the mysterious wonder-working 'Margrave' in his host's A Strange Story" (Wyndham, p. 43) (14)

In addition to Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton and his son, other literary personages who attended Home's Ealing séances included Mrs. Frances ("Fanny") Trollope (1780-1863), and her son Thomas (1810-1892).

The Trollopes, like many other people, had heard of Home's fame before the medium's arrival in England. Thomas Trollope wrote: "We, my mother and I, had heard tidings from America of a certain Mr. Daniel Hume, of whom very strange things were related"(15).

Tom's wife, Frances Eleanor Trollope, wrote that Mrs. Trollope "attended many of Hume's sittings while she was in London, at the house of Mr. & Mrs. Rymer at Ealing"(16).

Home himself recorded the séance held with the Trollopes, at which an accordion was played by 'spirits', and the table raised (Incidents, p. 67). Tom Trollope described in detail the events at this séance. He noted that the arrival of Sir David Brewster (17) marked the beginning of the séance, the company gathering around the table (What I Remember, I, 375). Cracking sounds were heard, the table quivered and shook, was lifted alternately at either end, and then rose completely from the floor. Trollope wrote that he and Sir David Brewster "precipitated ourselves from our chairs under the table" (What I Remember, I, 376), in order to determine how the table was raised. It was hovering four or five inches above the floor, without any support. Trollope continued that he asked Sir David "Does it not seem that this table is raised by some means wholly inexplicable?" (ibid). Sir David, apparently, replied: "Indeed it would seem so!" (What I Remember, I, 377).

This séance in fact caused controversy later, when Sir David Brewster wrote a letter to The Times denying having seen anything remarkable at the séance. Tom Trollope was swift to rebuke what he saw as Sir David's attempt to avoid having to state his belief in Home's validity. Trollope wrote to Brewster, however: "it is a fact that he did do and say what I have related" (ibid)(18).

It is also evident in view of Trollope's and Brewster's action in throwing themselves beneath the levitated table to see how it was

raised, that the usual explanation of Home's levitation of tables and chairs - that he used his legs or feet - is an inadequate over-simplification. On the other hand, the trance phenomenon observed at this séance seems trivial and absurd: while entranced, Home's 'spirit-guide' instructed the sitters: "When Daniel recovers give him some bottled porter" (ibid). As we shall see, Browning - and, indeed, Elizabeth - noted a similar triviality in Home's utterances while in trance.

Critics of Home have attempted to undermine his credibility by stating that the Trollopes could not tolerate the medium. Jean Burton, for example, states that Mrs. Trollope "took an instantaneous dislike for Home" (Burton, p. 76). However, this seems to be quite without foundation: when Home later left England for the continent, he was invited by Mrs. Trollope to stay with her in Florence, as has already been stated. Madame Home, referring to Home's mediumistic phenomena, wrote that Mrs. Trollope "left England convinced of their genuineness, and Mr. T. A. Trollope ... shared her certainty" (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, p. 57), and: "Mrs. Trollope's spiritual convictions went much further than that recognition of the reality of the phenomena to which the testimony of her son is limited".(19).

It should be remembered, however, that Madam Home's intention throughout both of her books concerning her late husband was to uphold his validity. Nevertheless, she quoted the following statements of Tom Trollope:

> I have seen and felt physical facts wholly and utterly inexplicable, as I believe, by any known and generally received physical laws. I unhesitatingly reject the theory which considers such facts to be produced by means familiar to the best professors of legerdemain (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, p. 58),

and of Home's phenomena: "... be what may their origin ... they are not produced by any fraud, machinery, juggling, illusion or trickery on his part" (Gift of D. D. Home, pp. 13-14).

Again, Mrs. Trollope's daughter-in-law, referring to Mrs. Trollope's belief in the phenomena, asserted: "it seems to have been in her case the same as in her son's - namely, a state of nicely balanced doubt as to the metaphysical, and of complete belief in the physical phenomena" (F. Trollope, Life and Lit. Work, II, 280).

The ambiguity of Trollope's attitude towards Home - or, at any rate, his recognition of the questionability of some of Home's phenomena - is clear from his statement that the so-called 'spirit-hands' which he saw at séances seemed to him "like long kid gloves stuffed with some substance" (What I Remember, I, 382). Again, he wrote of Home: "I was not left with the conviction that he was altogether a trustworthy man. Nor was I fully persuaded of the reverse" (ibid). Elizabeth Barrett Browning was to express a similar ambiguity in her attitude towards Home when, as we shall see, she suggested that Home's moral questionability was not necessarily proof of his mediumistic invalidity. For, that summer when Home was staying with the Rymers in Ealing, the Brownings - as well as the Lyttons and Trollopes - were among those who visited him, and the Brownings' experiences and impressions will be discussed in Chapter Two.

In the autumn of 1855 Home left England for Florence, accompanied by the Rymers' son. In Florence, a number of remarkable séances occurred, including one at which a piano was reputedly levitated while still being played by the pianist, Countess Antoinette Orsini (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, pp. 59-60). By far the greatest amount of attention received by the medium came, however, from the Anglo-American community in Florence, to which the Brownings - in name, at least, belonged.

Home stayed with the Trollopes, and held many séances with them (What I Remember, I, 377-80; F. Trollope, Life and Lit. Work, II, 266-71). Tom Trollope recorded that his wife "was a strong disbeliever in all Mr. Hume's pretentions. She strongly disliked the man" (What I Remember, I, 381).

It was through the Trollopes that Home made the acquaintance of the American sculptor, Hiram Powers (20). Powers wrote to Mrs. Trollope: "Pray thank Mr. Hume for his desire to know me: it cannot equal mine to know him, and witness some of those remarkable manifestations of which I have heard so much" (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, p. 58).

Home became friendly with the Powers, who resided in a former monastery. It seems that Home was able to communicate with the 'spectral visitants' who were disturbing the family, and who transpired to be the spirits of monks" (Incidents, pp. 87-92).

However, Home soon became unpopular with the local populace, and he was attacked one night in the streets of Florence. In January 1856, the Minister of the Interior to the Grand Duke of Tuscany warned Home that enemies were accusing him of Satanism and stirring up feeling against him (Incidents, pp. 92-93). Accordingly, therefore, Home moved on to Naples. It was here that he learned by 'spiritual communications' that his powers would leave him for a year's duration (ibid). While there, he met Robert Dale Owen, whom he converted to Spiritualism (21).

Home entertained notions of becoming a monk at this time, and he was received into the Roman Catholic Church. He was sponsored by a group of Italian noblemen, and after his reception he had a private audience with Pope Pius IX (Incidents, p. 95). Before leaving Italy he had also made the acquaintance of Teresa Guiccoli, a former mistress of Lord Byron, and Lady Katherine Fleming (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, p. 59).

Home's consumptive lung had meanwhile worsened. It seems that he was suffering from mental or nervous exhaustion, and this was the cause of his temporary loss of 'mediumistic power' for that year. However, when he left Italy he travelled to Paris where, in February 1857, his power returned to him (ibid).

Home was presented at the French court to Napoleon III and the Empress Eugenie. At this moment, when his 'powers' returned to him and he began to function as a medium again, his confessor disowned him. Home held numerous public séances at the court, producing a variety of sensational phenomena (Incidents, p. 96). While in France, he met a number of well-known personages, including the writer, Prosper Mérimée (1803-1870), author of Carmen, who held an unfavourable view of Home (Wyndham, p. 77), the dramatist Victorien Sardou (1831-1908), who was "profoundly impressed" by Home, and who had also been a medium at one time (Burton, p. 112), and the novelist Arsène Houssaye (1815-1896), who was "convinced that Home lived in suppressed terror of the demons he had inadvertently called up" (Ibid). Other notable querents included Alexandre Dumas (1802-1870), and his son the novelist, poet and playwright also named Alexandre Dumas (1824-1895) (ibid).

Home's mediumship at the French court became so controversial that frequent attempts were made to expose him. He went to great lengths to rebut one assertion made by Marshall Barguay d'Hilliers, Nadaud and Eugene Guiriot, a noted swordsman, that they had duped and thereby unmasked Home (Incidents, pp. 110-114). As Jean Burton indicates, however, there is no definite evidence that Home was ever exposed as a fraud, or that he was ever detected in trickery (Burton, p. 30). Similarly, Ronald Pearsall asserts that Home "was never detected in any fraud or double-dealing" (Pearsall, p. 71). Nevertheless, many explanations for his phenomena were suggested, as Home himself rather smugly recorded: it was said that he used a pet monkey to produce

'phenomena' at his séances (Incidents, p. 118), that he was a freak and had legs capable of elongation (Incidents, p. 119); that he had feet like a baboon's; that he sent in beforehand his own carefully prepared tables to be used in séances; that he used wax hands and arms; that he hypnotised his audiences and made them believe in bogus phenomena (22); that he used tongs to touch his sitters as if with 'spirit hands'; that he used a magic lantern to project spiritual forms in his séances, and a large balloon fashioned like himself, which he would inflate and use in séances to simulate levitation; that he drugged his sitters; that he had the devil at his command; that the rappings were the result of the medium's involuntary muscular movements or of unconscious cerebration; that he used ventriloquism, eletric batteries or mechanical devices attached to his legs; that the rappings were the crackings of his toe-joints, knees or thigh-bones, or the throbs of an unusually loud pulse-beat - even that he produced the raps by rubbing his boots together, or by clicking his thumb-nails together. It was suggested that he fitted springs onto séance-tables to produce levitation and table-tilting, that he bribed servants to conceal machinery in the room before séances, that he bought information about his sitters by employing an army of secret investigators, and, finally, that he was a master of conjuring and juggling (ibid).

Home, however, survived all such assaults, and his eventual fall from grace in the French court was probably due to "the increasing influence that he was exercising over the Empress" (Wyndham, p. 81), rather than to his having been exposed - of which, as we have seen, there is no evidence. However, there is a suggestion that Home was expelled from Paris for homosexual practices. This suggestion is seen by many as a reason for Browning's antipathy towards Home, as will be discussed later - although it is true that Browning's aversion

towards Home had already been expressed before Home's expulsion from France. E. J. Dingwall cites the assertion of Count Horace de Salviac de Viel-Castel "that Home was accused ... of unnatural practices", and that "it was well known that Home was having an affair with Ernest Baroche" (23). Dingwall asserts that this fact was embarrassing to the royal family, who had favoured Home with their patronage, and it was for this reason that he was asked to leave Paris (ibid). However, it seems far more likely that Home was expelled because he was suspected of attempting to wield political influence over the Empress. Alternatively, the accusation of homosexuality may well have been a trumped-up charge designed to destroy Home's reputation, thereby removing his influence over the Empress. His denouncers may even have intended to have Home expelled and therefore undermined as a medium. At any rate, Robert Lytton seems not to have believed the assertion. He wrote to Browning on April 29, 1858:

> I heard at Paris ... that Hume the Medium was in the Prisons of Mazas for an unnatural offence! But young Phipps ... contradicts; and disposes of the story by telling me that he met Hume at Rome, and that H was about to be married to a Russian lady (Owen Meredith, Letters, p. 146).

When Home left Paris he went briefly to America, returning in May 1857 (Incidents, pp. 103-115). He proceeded to Baden-Baden, where he met the Kings of Wurtenberg and Prussia, both of whom attended his séances and were impressed by what they saw (Incidents, p. 117). He also held séances with the King of Bavaria (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, p. 84), with Lord Howden, the British minister at Madrid, who "came to a séance, and was startled by the phenomena he witnessed" (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, p. 96), and with the Prince of Nassau (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, p. 99). Among his correspondents were

"Madame de Balzac, widow of the great novelist and a life-long friend of Home" (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, p. 101), and the composer Rossini (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, pp. 101-2).

In January 1858 Home met the Queen of Holland at The Hague, and impressed her too with his mediumship (Incidents, p. 124). While on his European travels he met the Russian Countess de Koucheleff, and subsequently became engaged to her sister, Alexandrina Sacha (Incidents, p. 125). The party proceeded to St. Petersberg, accompanied by Alexandre Dumas, who was to act as Home's godfather at the wedding (Incidents, p. 127).

Home's power again temporarily left him, and at that time Tsar Alexander II invited Home to conduct a séance in his presence. Home therefore had to refuse, and the Tsar - Sacha's godfather - immediately obstructed her marriage to Home. Very conveniently, Home soon discovered that his power had returned, and in August 1858, he and Sacha were married, and Sacha was converted to belief in Spiritualism (Incidents, p. 128). Also present at the wedding was Count Alexis Tolstoy (1817-1875), poet, novelist and playwright (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, pp. 114-115).

Home's illustrious marriage naturally attracted considerable attention: Elizabeth Barrett Browning wryly wrote to her sister Henrietta, just after the announcement of Home's marriage, and referring to Sacha: "Certainly her tast must be extraordinary. She is rather good-looking and apparently five and twenty ... Think of the conjugal furniture floating about the room at night, Henrietta" (24).

In Russia, in 1859, Home was severely ill with internal inflammation, but was, he declared, 'cured' by spiritual hands (Incidents, p. 131). His son was born soon afterwards and, predictably was declared by Home to have mediumistic faculties. Indeed, as Elizabeth

Barrett Browning wrote of Home's son to her sister Henrietta: "His boy is said to be a more wonderful medium than himself" (25).

Home held a sensational séance with William and Mary Howitt (26), during which accordions were played, a geranium sprig was given to Mary Howitt, whose dress was pulled, spirit hands were seen and touched, Indian idol-statuettes were cast down, and Home and the table were levitated (Incidents, pp. 189-191).

Whatever domestic happiness Home may have been enjoying was short-lived, however. His wife became ill in November, 1861, worsened, and died in France the following year, aged twenty-two (Incidents, p. 211).

Home continued to practise his mediumship, and held a number of séances with Mrs. Milner-Gibson (see Note Seven) (D.D. Home, Life and Mission, p. 137), and others who attended his séances included Lady Shelley, and the novelist Mrs. Lynn Linton, who proved to be a very sceptical observer (27). Other notable figures who were interested included Ruskin and Dante Gabriel Rossetti (28), Joseph Durham, the sculptor (1814-1877), Nassau Senior, the political economist (1790-1864), John Bright (29) and Thackeray, of whose spiritualistic interests more will be said in Chapter Two. Another querent was the poet and journalist Sir Edwin Arnold (1832-1904) (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, p. 139). Sir Edwin attended several of Home's séances in 1869, and he wrote:

> I regard many of the 'manifestations' as genuine, undeniable, and inexplicable by any known law, or any collusion, arrangement or deception of the senses .., I conceive it to be the duty and the interest of men of science and sense to examine and prosecute the enquiry as one which has fairly passed from the region of ridicule (Gift of D. D. Home, p. 10).

Home also conducted séances with the painter Sir Edwin Landseer (1802-1873) (Gift of D. D. Home, p. 129), the novelist Catherine Sinclair (1800-1864), Robert Bell, novelist and journalist (1800-1867), and Robert Chambers (see Note Seven) (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, pp. 141, 146-7, 150), while "in January 1861, Mr. James Hutchinson, for many years Chairman of the London Stock Exchange, was present at a séance with Mr. Home" (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, p. 176). Home continued to attract the interest of royalty and aristocracy, including Prince George of Solms, the Marchioness of Hastings and Lady Cambermere (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, pp. 226-227).

Home created controversy wherever he went. When he left England once more, to live in Rome and study sculpture, the authorities there ordered him on January 2nd, 1864 "on the ground of sorcery, to quit Rome within three days" (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, p. 207). The event so outraged Home's supporters that questions were asked in the House of Commons, and it was expected that Home would be upheld because of his closeness to the Milner-Gibsons, Thomas Milner-Gibson being President of the Board of Trade, and his wife one of Home's most avid disciples. However:

> Mr. Milner-Gibson had never been present at a séance ... people annoyed him by ... associating his name with Spiritualism; and in 1864, when Mr. Roebuck brought the question of Mr. Home's expulsion from Rome before Parliament, an appeal that he addressed to Mr. Milner-Gibson, under the misconception of his being a Spiritualist, fairly drove the President of the Board of Trade out of the House (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, p. 170).

(John Arthur Roebuck, 1801-1879, was M.P. for Sheffield).

In 1866, Home was co-founder of the Spiritual Athenaeum, a society for the propagation of Spiritualism. It was through this body that Home became involved in another controversy that brought his activities before the attention of the general public once more. This controversy was the Lyon law-suit of 1867-8. Through the Athenaeum, Home became acquainted with a Mrs. Lyon, an elderly, rich and neurotic widow who, on the 'instructions' of her deceased husband, bestowed great wealth upon Home, who became her adopted 'son' and even assumed the surname of Lyon-Home. However, before long the fickle Mrs. Lyon thought better of her gifts to the medium, and demanded their return. Home was arrested, and a law-suit ensued. It was clear that Mrs. Lyon's stupidity and romantic obsession with the medium were equally matched by his cunning and opportunism. Nevertheless, although the case was decided in Mrs. Lyon's favour, and although Home lost much of his aristocratic support, as Ronald Pearsall describes, Home "managed to preserve an odd dignity" (Pearsall, p. 75), and the sheer mysterious aloofness of the medium "confirmed Home as the most important figure in nineteenth-century Spiritualism" (ibid), although his personal life and finances had been mercilessly investigated, and although he had been pilloried by the press and the public.

Nevertheless, he was always able to re-affirm his reputation by a demonstration of mediumistic power: in November 1868, he was sensationally levitated through the window of a house in London, re-entering through another window, in the presence of Lord Adare, Lord Lindsay and Captain Wynne (30). Other interesting phenomena which Home produced comparitively late in his mediumistic career included the picking up of hot coals, and the ability to elongate or contract his body (Wyndham, pp. 203-4). The former Wyndham inadequately attributed to the medium having smeared his hands with a mixture of soap and sugar, or with lemon juice (Wyndham, p. 203).

Home left the country after the Lyon suit, and was in fact resident in Paris during the Prussian siege of 1871 (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, p. 326). That year he again held séances before the Tsar of Russia at the Winter Palace in St. Petersberg, and he re-married in 1871, his second wife being another Russian aristocrat, of the Aksakoff family (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, p. 367).

On the Homes' return to England, Home survived intensive investigation by the notable psychic researcher and scientist, Sir William Crookes (31) (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, p. 331).

Home's second wife bore him a daughter who died in infancy (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, p. 373). Home's health gradually worsened after 1872. He spent his last years in France and Switzerland. In 1877 he published Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism, a historical/expository work significantly aimed to expose fraudulent mediumship. Home died in France, in 1868, at the age of fifty-three.

As we have seen, Home's life is at once fascinating and baffling, and the problem of his mediumship remains yet to be solved. Probably at times he did resort to trickery and dubious practices, and some of his phenomena, indeed, appeartrite and trivial. However, Home was unique as never having been exposed as a fraud. He managed to maintain his position as leader of Spiritualism throughout the world, surviving many investigations. Some of his phenomena - the levitation, the elongation - still cannot readily be explained. As far as Home's moral integrity is concerned, it is evident that he was a pretentious, arrogant and scheming opportunist, though nevertheless undeniable that he was never a paid medium. From the point of view of the present study, Home's life and, more important, the problem of his integrity as a medium, are of great consequence in discussing the Brownings' attitudes towards Spiritualism. As will be seen in the following

chapters, Home was largely responsible both for confirming Elizabeth Barrett Browning's spiritualist beliefs, and the intense antipathy towards the subject held by Browning. His own role and moral standing are, therefore, important in assessing the bases of these two conflicting attitudes. It has to be determined whether Elizabeth was a deluded gull and, if so, how her adherance to a fraudulent creed can be justified in view of her intelligence and profound moral sense. It is important to consider whether Browning was irrational in his extraordinarily aggressive aversion towards Home, or whether he had indeed exposed an upstart, cheating leach. Attempts will be made to answer these questions in the following two chapters.

In this present discussion, frequent references have been made to Home's famous and distinguished sitters. Apart from the validity of the medium, therefore, the position of his querents too requires exploration. Here, again, the stand-point of Elizabeth Barrett Browning is central in determining whether she and the others were merely infected by a hysterical craze. It is clear that Spiritualism was a fasionable subject in the leading salons - indeed, the courts - of Europe. It is probable that many of those who sat with Home were simply interested in one of the preoccupations of their age. It is likely, too, that many were inspired to investigate by the impulse of enquiry that was a major factor in an age of discovery and scientific development. Some were turning to the sphere of the psychic and the occult at a time when traditional Christian doctrines were exercising diminished authority. Many - perhaps Elizabeth Barrett Browning - were seeking comfort in the reassuring promises that Spiritualism offered to mortal humanity, and some of these probably transcended the mere dread of death and pursued their enquiries in a spirit of revelation, seeking to solve one of the ultimate problems and questions facing the human race: does the

individual survive physical death,and, if so, how and in what form?

For the moment, it would be useful to consider the course of Spiritualism after the time of D. D. Home. It will soon be realised that the lofty ideals of enquiry discussed above too frequently fell short of fulfilment before the frustrating and disappointing prospect of fraudulence and trickery. Fortunately this depressing picture is relieved by the laughable nature of the postures and practices of many of the mediums concerned.

Two notable American mediums were the brothers Ira and William Davenport. In 1857 they managed to survive what was clearly a very superficial investigation carried out by a committee of scientific researchers from Harvard University. In 1864 they arrived in England, and began to conduct séances. The novelist Charles Reade (1814-1884) is known to have attended at least two of their séances (Wyndham, p. 133), and Samuel Butler (1835-1902) derided them (Wyndham, p. 135). Their mediumship seems now to belong more properly to the art of escapology than to Spiritualism, for it included the tying up of the brothers in a cabinet, and their subsequent release by 'spirit hands'. They were exposed in Liverpool in February 1865, when a sailor tied them up so expertly that they could not move (Wyndham, pp. 136-137). Nevertheless, they too, attracted a large following abroad, and operated - like Home - at the courts of Russia and France (Pearsall, p. 77). Other notable mediums included Mrs. Marshall, among whose sitters was William Michael Rossetti (1829-1919) (Wyndham, p. 139), Mrs. Susan Horn, who claimed to be in contact with notable spirits as diverse as Mary, Queen of Scots and the late Prince Albert (Wyndham, p. 154), and the Rev. William Stainton Moses (1840-1892), a curate on the Isle of Man whose sermons were frequently interrupted by the sound of spirit-raps in the pulpit (Wyndham, p. 155).

As time passed, the phenomena produced became increasingly sensational, and whole 'spirit forms' materialised at séances. Later, after 1903, the term 'ectoplasm' was used to describe the vaporous substance that reputedly issued from entranced mediums (Pearsall, p. 100). Another development was the dubious area of spirit-photography, undertaken initially by Frederick Hudson with the assistance of mediums like Mrs. Guppy and Georgina Houghton (Pearsall, pp. 120-3).

In 1882, the Society for Psychical Research was established by scientific enquirers such as F. W. H. Myers, Professor W. F. Barrett (not related to the family of Elizabeth Barrett Browning), Edmund Gurney, Henry Sidgwick and Frank Podmore. In the light of increasingly rigorous investigation, it became easier to expose fraudulent mediums. Among these were the Unitarian 'Dr' Merick, who claimed to have been carried aloft by spirit hands from Bristol to Swindon (Wyndham, p. 157). He was exposed after a séance when his luggage was found to contain "masks and gloves, and jointed rods and wisps of muslin" (ibid); he was subsequently imprisoned for fraud. Similarly, another American medium, Henry Slade, whose séances included the writing of messages by spirits on slates, was exposed by Professor Lankester and Horatio Dankin, tried, found guilty, but released on bail, no further action being taken (Wyndham, p. 275). Another fraudulent medium was Florence Cook, between whom and Mrs. Guppy there existed bitter rivalry. Miss Cook produced an attendant spirit-form named Katie at her séances. In 1874 Florence Cook was investigated by an electrician, Cromwell Varley, and Sir William Crookes. It is possible that Florence Cook was amorously involved with Crookes, who allowed himself to be deceived (Pearsall, p. 226), and that 'Katie' was the medium herself, disguised, the 'entranced' medium nearby being merely a pile of cushions covered with drapery (Pearsall, pp. 227-230).

However, despite the many fraudulent mediums, the frequent exposures and the scientific explanations for reputedly 'supernatural' occurrences, Spiritualism continued to be a powerful factor in the minority circles which adhered to it throughout the twentieth century. The movement in this country formed itself into such organised bodies as the Spiritualist National Union, and the London Spiritualist Mission. Spiritualism was the subject of an upsurge of public interest following the First World War when, due to the slaughter of servicemen on a large scale, many people faced bereavement in an increasingly cynical and materialist age. Some spiritualists, indeed, still adhere to a quasi-Christian basis for their practices, but such a belief is by no means general (Crehan, p.4). Indeed, in Britain and in America attempts have been made to formalise spiritualist 'doctrine', such as in 1934 when the President of the International Federation of Spiritualists, E. W. Oaten, attempted to present Spiritualism "as a religion in competition with existing Christianity" (ibid).

Between the wars Spiritualism experienced a gradual decline, and, interestingly "the aftermath of the Second World War was distinguished by no such wave of popularity for Spiritualism as had followed the First" (Crehan, p. 6). Nevertheless, spiritualist journals such as The Psychic Times (launched in 1940) have interested a minority readership. Indeed, that Spiritualism has always succeeded in arousing some interest is evident from the fact that in 1966 television cameras filmed a spiritualist meeting for the first time (Crehan, p.3). More important still, in very recent times Spiritualism has begun to attract attention once again in an age of renewed interest in astrology, ghosts and hauntings, transcendental meditation and eastern mysticism, possession and exorcism, witchcraft, tarot cartomancy and other occult phenomena. Psychic research, and investigation of telepathy, extra-sensory perception and the paranormal, is now being investigated in

many parts of the world, including the Soviet Union.

In this respect, therefore, the modern atomic age bears an interesting resemblance to the increasingly 'scientific' era of the nineteenth century in which there was also widespread interest in many branches of occultism. It needs to be recognised, however, that such widespread movements of ideas, theories and attitudes are both the product of the speculations of individual minds, and do themselves influence the thinking of individuals. In the following two chapters it is intended that an attempt will be made to explore the spiritualistic beliefs of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, to determine how her thoughts were influenced by the developments which occurred in that sphere in the society around her, and how her impressions were affected by the activities of other individuals such as D. D. Home. The interesting subject of Elizabeth's relationship with Browning in this respect will be discussed, and suggestions will be made relating to the questions of why she became interested in the subject, the direction in which this interest led her, and the outcome of her speculation and investigation.

Notes to Chapter One

(1) Philip and Sybil Phillips see Biblical anticipations for many of the séance-phenomena which developed in nineteenth century Spiritualism, including mediums and clairvoyants (Biblical prophets and seers), clairvoyant visions, spirit writing, (the writing upon the wall at Belshazzar's feast), materialization, (the three men who appeared to Abraham, the materialised hands described in Ezekiel and Daniel), séances, (the Witch of Endor, the apostolic gathering at Pentecost). [Is Death the End (London, 1972), pp. 115-116].

Although such generalised interpretations of ancient history are dangerous, the parallelism between these ancient phenomena, and the basic aspects of nineteenth century Spiritualism, are clear.

(2) Grillot de Givry: A Pictorial Anthology of Witchcraft, Magic and Alchemy (New York, 1958), p. 168. Later cited as 'de Givry'.

(3) Joseph Crehan, S.J.: Spiritualism (London 1967), p. 12. Later cited as 'Crehan'.

(4) Rev. Frederick G. Lee: Glimpses of the Supernatural (London 1875), II, 141. Later cited as 'Lee'.

(5) Horace Wyndham: Mr. Sludge the Medium (London 1937), p. 8. Later cited as 'Wyndham'.

(6) Robert Pearsall: The Table Rappers (London 1972), p. 37. Later cited as 'Pearsall'.

(7) Catherine Crowe, nee Stevens (1800?-1876) was a minor novelist, author of Susan Hopley (1841), and Lilly Dawson (1847). Her The Night Side of Nature (1848), was a catalogue of supernatural, predominantly spectral, phenomena, and her Spiritualism and the Age we Live In appeared in 1859. Mrs. Crowe was deeply interested in the occult, and, as Adeline Sergeant asserts: "If Mrs. Crowe had lived in these days, she would have found

herself in intimate relations with the Society for Psychic Research", [Women Novelists of Queen Victoria's Reign (London 1897), p. 152].

Robert Chambers (1802-1871), and his brother William (1800-1883), were Edinburgh publishers of, among other things, Chambers Journal.

Mrs. Milner-Gibson was Susanna Arethusa née Cullum (b. 1814). She was a leader in society, whose salons were attended by many famous political and literary figures of the age, including Dickens and Victor Hugo. She was deeply interested in Mesmerism and Spiritualism. In 1832 she married Thomas Milner-Gibson (1806-1884), an early exponent of free trade policy, and President of the Board of Trade (1859-1866). It was to him that questions were addressed in the Commons concerning the expulsion of the medium D. D. Home from Rome, as will be discussed shortly.

(8) D. D. Home: Incidents in My Life (London 1864), pp. 5-6. Later cited as Incidents.

(9) Without analysing at great length the possibility or otherwise of the genuine possession of psychic gifts of some kind by mediums such as Home, it is clearly essential to recognise that fraudulent mediums abounded and produced similar phenomena by trickery and imposture. Horace Wyndham discussed many of these, asserting that levitation could be simulated by the medium attaching boots to his hands; that the touching of sitters by so-called 'spirit hands' could be produced with "a pair of lazy tongs", and that the writing of messages by spirits on the ceiling of the darkened séance-room could be done by means of the medium's use of "a telescopic rod, with a pencil attached to it" (Wyndham, p. 100). Wyndham also asserted that spirit-hands could have been "rubber gloves filled with air", that

spirit raps were possibly made by the bare toes of the medium, who may easily have removed his boots underneath the table, for the purpose (Wyndham, p. 90).

It seems therefore, that some of Home's 'phenomena' could readily be explained, although it is true that he was never exposed as a fraud, and although it remains possible that he possessed some form of so-called 'super-sensory' perception or power.

(10) Robert Lee Wolff: Strange Stories and other explorations in Victorian Fiction (Boston, Mass., 1971) pp. 148-149.

The suggestion has been made that Bulwer-Lytton was also the head of a magic club in London. The Mahatmas speak of a "secret school for the practical teaching of magick, founded ... under the leadership of Lord Lytton's father." [The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett (from the Mahatmas M. and K. H.) ed. A. T. Barker (London 1926), p. 210].

Robert Lee Wolff rejects such a suggestion as untrue (Wolff, p. 264).

(11) Letters from Owen Meredith (Robert, First Earl of Lytton) to Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, ed. Aurelia Brooks Harlan and J. Lee Harlan (Waco, 1937), p. 110, letter dated July 1855. Later cited as'Owen Meredith, Letters'.

Robert Lytton, diplomat, became an attaché in Washington in 1849, and subsequently held positions as attaché, consul or chargé d'affaires in Florence, Paris The Hague, St. Petersberg, Vienna, Belgrade, Athens, Lisbon and Madrid. In 1876 he became Viceroy of India, and was made Earl of Lytton in 1880.

He wrote poems, and novels, under the pseudonym 'Owen Meredith'. Much of his early work reveals the influence of Browning's poetry. As will be seen in Chapter Two, Lytton

had much to do with Elizabeth Barrett Browning's spiritualistic interests in Florence.

(12) Home's second wife identified 'Z---' as Zanoni, [Madame Dunglas Home: D. D. Home, his Life and Mission (London 1888), p. 51. Later cited as D. D. Home, Life and Mission].

Zanoni (1842), concerns the central character of that name, who succeeds in acquiring occult knowledge through the assistance of spirits. He produces precious metals and manages to prolong his own life for several centuries. Eventually he surrenders his supernatural powers in order to marry an opera signer.

Bulwer-Lytton's work, in novels such as Zanoni reflects his interest in the occult.

(13) Jean Burton: Hey-day of a Wizard, D. D. Home the Medium (London 1948), p. 70. Later cited as 'Burton'.

(14) The character Margrave is a strange, temperamental man in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, capable of intense viciousness and sudden impulses of contrasting gentleness. Obsessed with youthfulness, he prefers the company of children to adults. His chief aim is to discover the 'elixir of life', in pursuit of which he has murdered an eastern occultist, Haroun of Aleppo. He is mesmerised by one Sir Philip Derval, and then reveals the fact that he has no soul. Margrave murders Sir Philip, and subjects and abducts the heroine, Lilian Ashleigh. The hero, Fenwick, rescues her and they flee to Australia. Returning to England, Margrave, dying, approaches Fenwick and begs him to prepare the elixir. Realising that the fate of Lilian is bound up with that of Margrave, Fenwick agrees and concocts the elixir. Cosmic forces intervene, however, striving against Margrave, who is unable to take the potion and dies, thus releasing Lilian.

It is clear from this précis of the novel, therefore, that Margrave is a villain and a murderer who desires to transcend natural and divine law in aspiring to immortality, and in aiming to become God-like.

It is evident that Margrave's intention - though not his stature - classes him with Milton's Satan and Marlowe's Faustus. If Bulwer-Lytton were indeed basing Margrave upon Home, any such intention can have been, at the most, superficial. Home was not a murderer, an abductor, nor an alchemist. The qualities in Home which Bulwer-Lytton may have used in his creation of Margrave, therefore, were probably the medium's mysterious and unaccountable personage, his involvement in the occult, and his whole image as a 'magus-figure'.

(15) T. A. Trollope: What I Remember (London, 1887), I, 374. Later cited as What I Remember.

Thomas Adolphus Trollope contributed to Dickens' Household Words, and wrote novels and historical works.

Mrs. Trollope took to writing fiction when her family was reduced to poverty, and produced many novels, including The Widow Barnaby (1838). Her most famous work was Domestic Manners of the Americans (1832), which she wrote after a visit to America, and which gave great offence to the American people.

Her other son, the novelist Anthony Trollope, was less involved in Spiritualism than his mother and brother, though he was certainly interested in the phenomena. On June 3, 1868, he wrote to Kate Field:

> I don't seem to care much about Planchette. However, I am mild and submit to be taken to Planchettes and Hume's ... But when tables rap and boards write, and dead young women come and tickle my knee under a big

table, I find the manifestation to be unworthy of the previous grand ceremony of death. Your visitor from above or below should be majestical, should stalk in all paraplied from head to foot - at least with a white sheet, and should not condescend to catechetical and alphabetical puzzles. [Letters of Anthony Trollope, ed. Bradford Allen Booth (London, 1951), p. 219].

(19) Frances Eleanor Trollope: Frances Trollope, her life and literary Work from George III to Victoria (London, 1895), II, 257. Later cited as F. Trollope, life and lit. Work.

(17) Sir David Brewster (1781-1868), natural philosopher, was a child prodigy who attended Edinburgh University at the age of twelve, becoming editor of the Edinburgh Magazine when only twenty-one. He became an Episcopalian preacher, but resigned due to inhibiting nervousness which restricted his oratory. Turning to science, he became a member of the Royal Society in 1851, and won awards for his research into the polarisation of light. He invented the Kaleidoscope in 1816, and conducted research into optics, light and photography. Knighted in 1831, he became principal of Edinburgh University in 1859, and vice-chancellor in 1860.

(18) D. D. Home too denied Sir David Brewster's accusations. Sir David had suggested that the 'spirit raps' at the séance were produced by Home's feet on the table (Incidents, pp. 248-9). However, Home quoted the argument of one of his disciples, a Mr. Coleman, who wondered why Brewster had not exposed Home at the séance, if he had considered him fraudulent, thereby sparing Mrs. Trollope from entertaining "this arch imposter" in Florence, as she later did (Incidents, p. 251). Finally, Home cited Tom Trollope's assurances that the table had moved at the séance, and that the sitters had been urged to look beneath it while

it was raised (Incidents, p. 253).

(19) Madame Home: The Gift of D. D. Home (London, 1890), pp. 13-14. Later cited as Gift of D. D. Home.

(20) T. A. Trollope: 'Some Recollections of Hiram Powers', Lippincotts Magazine, VI, Feb. 1875, 211. Further details of the Trollopes' relationship with Home follow, 211-13. Trollope wrote:

> ... no amount of suspicious watching which I was able to exercise in my house, and which Powers was able to exercise in his, enabled us to discover any smallest degree of imposture, or fair grounds for suspecting imposture, as regards the physical & material phenomena which were witnessed, (p. 212).

Hiram Powers (1805-1873), produced important busts of notable men, and the statues of Franklin and Jefferson in the Capitol, Washington D.C. He established his studio in Florence in 1837.

Powers' daughter Ellen recorded that her father's involvement with Home began when Powers:

> had taken a lively interest in the spiritualistic discussions going on, and with characteristic impartiality he determined to investigate for himself. The medium was therefore invited to hold séances at our house, and a long series of these experiments took place with the result that while my father did not attempt to explain the phenomena he declared himself convinced of their genuineness. ('Recollections of My Father', Vermonter XII, March 1967, 79).

Ellen Powers described some of the phenomena produced by Home:

> In one instance a massive oak table danced to the

> music of Yankee Doodle with such vehemence as to cause the oil in lamps placed on the table to be forced out. Once, my mother suddenly felt the weight of a child's head laid on her lap and recognised the action as peculiar to the little one she had lost. Whimsical or serious, the manifestations never suggested a suspicion of fraud on the part of the medium (ibid).

Ellen Powers concluded, however: "As soon as my father had convinced himself that Hume was no juggler he discontinued the séances, considering them dangerous and unhealthful" (ibid). This article is later cited as Recollections of my Father.

(21) Incidents, p. 94.

Both Robert Dale Owen (1801-1877), and his father Robert Owen (1771-1858), the socialist, philanthropist and pioneer of industrial co-operation, were spiritualists. Frank Podmore describes fully Robert Owen's involvement in Spiritualism asserting that "The veteran Robert Owen was converted to the new faith a few years before his death" [Modern Spiritualism, (London, 1902), I, 209], and that Owen "had several sittings with Mrs. Hayden and various private mediums" (II, 18). Podmore describes Owen's attendance at one of Home's séances (II, 225), and asserts that spiritualistic doctrines of a coming new order were in keeping with Owen's social ideals:

> Owen held his interest in Spiritualism as a revelation of a future life subordinate to its practical importance as a means of hastening the advancement of the millennium, the cause to which all his life had been devoted. [Robert Owen, a biography (London, 1906) II, 612].

Robert Dale Owen, his son, member of the American House of Representatives, American minister to Italy, supporter of the anti-slavery movement and miscellaneous writer, was introduced to Spiritualism by his father; but his early encounters with the phenomenon in Naples in 1853, left him unconvinced. [R. W. Leopold: Robert Dale Owen, a biography (Harvard, 1940) p. 308]. Leopold asserts that Owen's interest in Spiritualism did not begin until March 1856 (p. 321), intensifying after his father's death in 1858 (p. 327) and as he too neared death. Owen attempted to reconcile Christianity and Spiritualism (p. 331), and he wrote Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World (1860) and The Debatable Land between this World and the Next (1871).

However, in 1874 Owen was gulled by the bogus medium Miss Cook and her so-called accompanying 'spirit' Katie (Leopold, pp. 400-402), of whom more will be said later in this chapter. Owen staked his reputation on Miss Cook (Leopold, p. 402), but then retracted. His final insanity was perhaps partly due to this unfortunate delusion (Leopold, pp. 407-410), and his death too, therefore (Leopold, p. 414).

(22) The Rev. W. R. Inge, attempting to account for Home's mediumship, rejected the theories that Home was a servant of the Devil, that he was a clever conjuror, and that he was genuinely able to communicate with disembodied spirits. For the Rev. Inge, the basis of the phenomena was that "Home had a strange power of inducing hallucination even in several intelligent people gathered together." ('Mr. Sludge the Medium', Evening Standard, Aug. 29, 1944, 6).

(23) E. J. Dingwall: 'D. D. Home, Sorcerer of Kings', Some Human Oddities (London, 1947), p. 119. Later cited as 'Dingwall'.

Ernest Baroche was the son of Pierre Jules Baroche

(1802-1870), French Minister of the Interior and President of the Council of State. Ernest Baroche, later Imperial Rapporteur of the Council of State, died in the siege of Paris in 1870.

(24) Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Letters to her Sister 1846-1859, ed. Leonard Huxley (London, 1929), p. 293. Letter dated April 28, 1858. This work is later cited as Letters to her Sister.

Henrietta Moulton Barrett (1810-1860), the eldest of Elizabeth's younger sisters, married her cousin William Surtees Cook in 1850.

(25) Twenty-two unpublished letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning, addressed to Henrietta and Arabella Moulton Barrett, ed. J. A. S. Altham (New York, 1971), p. 90, letter dated March 28, 1859.

(26) William Howitt (1792-1879), miscellaneous writer, married Mary Botham (1799-1888) in 1821. Together they collaborated on a number of poetic works. William Howitt also wrote works on natural history and religion, and studied Mesmerism. He and his wife were both converted to Spiritualism, and Howitt contributed to The Spiritual Magazine. He also wrote The History of Magic (trans. 1854), and History of the Supernatural in all Ages and Nations (1863).

Mary Howitt's contribution to literature included her children's stories. She learned Swedish and Danish, and translated a number of Scandinavian works including Hans Andersen's tales.

(27) Mrs. Lynn Linton (1822-1897) attended one of Home's séances at Mrs. Milner-Gibson's, and said that his so-called 'levitation' was more probably due to him climbing onto a chaise-long in the semi-darkness, [G. S. Layard: Mrs. Lynn Linton, her Life, Letters and Opinions (London, 1901), pp. 168-169]. She

observed of the so-called 'materialised hands' at this séance that "no one was allowed to investigate" (Mrs. Lynn Linton, p. 170), and she believed that she had detected Home cheating when, claiming that he was in communication with a deceased child whom Mrs. Lynn Linton had loved when the child was alive, Home referred to it by a shortened form of its name never used during its earthly life-time (ibid).

Mrs. Linton observed:

> I have never seen anything whatever that might not have been done by trick and collusion... Yet all the time I was yearning to believe... And yet now, at the end of it all ... I believe that there is an uncatalogued and perhaps undeveloped human force ... which is the substratum of truth underlying the falsehoods of spiritualism (Mrs. Lynn Linton, pp. 173-4).

This important notion, that Man possesses some inner force, being or power unrelated to the disappointing performances of mediums, she expressed too in a letter to Mrs. Gedge, dated January 12, 1878:

> That there is a certain ... force in man ... I do not doubt for a moment, but it has nothing to do with unseen powers extra to himself (Mrs. Lynn Linton, p. 211)

(28) Madame Home, stating that "Mr. Ruskin's investigations of Spiritualism appear to have commenced in 1863" (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, p. 212), proceeded to assert:

> I do not know if he had two séances with Mr. Home or twenty; but that whatever their number, those séances had 'caught hold' of him, the friendly, and even affectionate tone of his subsequent letters to Home sufficiently demonstrates (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, p.213).

Madame Home published these letters (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, pp. 213-5).

Joan Evans describes how Ruskin's interest in Spiritualism occurred in two phases. In the years 1864-5 "Ruskin had already begun to be interested in the séances of Daniel Home" [John Ruskin (London, 1954), p. 283]. She asserts that "Ruskin ... was convinced by Home and on friendly and even affectionate terms with him" (p. 284), while in later years - 1875 - he attended séances with Mrs. Cowper-Temple.

However, E. T. Cook, while stating that Ruskin certainly attended Home's séances [The Life of John Ruskin (London, 1911) II, 71-72], asserted:

> Ruskin has been claimed as more or less of a convert. That he ... was fascinated by Home's personality, and that he was keenly interested in the manifestations, is clear; more than this cannot on the evidence be asserted (Life of John Ruskin, II, p. 72).

Ruskin's early assessment of the validity of Spiritualism was: "I have never weighed the evidence upon the subject" [Works ed. E. T. Cook and Alex Wedderburn (London, 1909), XI, 185]. However, he kept records of the séances which he attended (XVII, xxx-xxxiii), especially the experiments at Broadlands (XXIV, xxii-xxiv), and referred frequently to the phenomena (XXXVII, 189 and 193).

It would appear, therefore, that Ruskin was indeed interested Spiritualism, but never fully committed himself to belief in the phenomena.

As far as Rossetti is concerned, Oswald Doughty asserts that he

> instead of accepting the fashionable 'spiritualism'

> of the day, as most of his friends did, profanely ridiculed such famous mediums as Mrs. Marshall and the ineffable Mrs. Guppy who almost converted the angry and sceptical Browning himself!... Gabriel had, with Scott, William and Janey, occasionally attended spiritualistic séances. But his amused scepticism was very evident, [A Victorian Romantic: D. G. Rossetti (London, 1949), p. 395].

However, Doughty appears to ignore the fact that simply because Rossetti mocked certain mediums, then he had no belief in the phenomena, and Doughty's unreliability is borne out by his statement concerning Browning and Mrs. Guppy is without foundation. Again, it was surely with more than "amused scepticism" that Rossetti attempted to contact his dead wife. His brother, W. M. Rossetti, asserted of Gabriel:

> Mr. Bell Scott says that 'he began to call up the spirit of his wife by table-turning', and relates an incident of the kind happening in 1866; and he adds that 'long before that year' my brother had 'gone into spiritualism' [D. G. Rossetti, his family letters (London, 1895), I, 255].

William Rossetti asserted that he had witnessed such attempts in 1865-6, 1868 and 1870 (ibid).

Not all of Rossetti's spiritualistic investigations sound as seriously-motivated as these, however. He wrote to William Allingham on December 18, 1856 of the phenomenon:

> Browning, of course, pockets his hands and shakes his mane over the question, with occasional foamings at the mouth, and he and I laid siege to the subject one night, but to no purpose, [Letters of D.G. Rossetti to William Allingham, 1854-70 ed. G.B. Hill (London, 1897) p.195]

Again, W.M. Rossetti wrote:

> Madox Brown wrote on April 9, 1868: 'Blank gave a spirit soirée, at which Rossetti attended, and flowers grew under Blank's hands out of the dining-table and eau de Cologne was squirted over the guests in the dark; but Gabriel, growing irreverent, and addressing the Spirits by the too familiar appellation of 'Bogies', they squirted plain (it must be hoped clean) water over those present and withdrew (Letters to William Allingham, 1854-70, p. 204).

It would seem from all this evidence, therefore, that Rossetti, when bereaved, was reverently hopeful of obtaining proof of human spiritual survival beyond death and that, while doomed to disappointment on this front, was fully capable of exploiting humorously the absurdities of many séances and mediums.

(29) Madame Home described the attendance of John Bright (1811-1889) politician, reformer and philanthropist, at a sensational séance of Home's at which the table was levitated and rappings occurred (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, pp. 216-217). She asserted that Bright declared of the manifestations "They are very wonderful... It is very remarkable" (ibid) but she concluded: "I believe Mr. Bright has never made public any account of his experiences with Mr. Home" (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, p. 218)

Bright recorded a number of séances and conversations relating to Spiritualism in which he participated, including a séance with Home in April 1864, [Diaries, ed. Philip Bright (London, 1930), p. 276]; conversations with Henry Sidgwick, the psychical researcher and co-founder of the Society for Psychical Research (Diaries, pp. 370, 384), and with Sir Arthur Hobhouse (Diaries, p. 475).

Bright's records of these events include no expression of either firm belief or disbelief in the phenomenon, although he was clearly deeply interested. He also discussed the subject with Laurence Oliphant (Diaries, pp. 304-5).

Oliphant (1829-1888), war correspondent, journalist, novelist and mystic fell under the sinister influence of the spiritualist prophet Thomas Lake Harris, who ruled a commune in America and made Oliphant his complete spiritual slave and minion. Oliphant also attended spiritualist séances in Paris, [Margaret Oliphant W. Oliphant: Memoir of the Life of Laurence Oliphant and of Alice Oliphant, his wife, London 1891, II, 128-129].

(30) Sir Francis Burnand recorded these events, from a personal account of Lord Dunraven's, in Records and Reminiscences, London (1904), ii, 109-112. Lord Dunraven's own account appeared in his Windham Thomas Windham-Quinn: Experiences in Spiritualism with Mr. D. D. Home (London, c. 1870) pp. 82-83.

The events occurred at 15, Ashley Place, London.

(31) Sir William Crookes (1832-1919), physicist and chemist, discovered thallium in 1861. He invented the radiometer and spinthariscope, conducted research into the passage of electrical discharges through highly rarified gases, and developed special glass to protect glass-workers from the injurious rays emitted by molton glass.

Crookes was profoundly interested in psychical research, and conducted investigations into the activities of other mediums besides Home, such as Florence Cook. Crookes' experiments with Home were conducted in full light, and he developed a special cylindrical 'cage' which was placed beneath the séance-table, to test and gauge Home's levitation of it.

Chapter Two: Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Earlier Involvement in Spiritualism, c. 1847-1855, and the 'Ealing Séance'.

This discussion of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's involvement in Spiritualism is divided into two chapters for the sake of convenience. Here, in Chapter Two, the poet's interest in the phenomenon is traced from her first encounters with Spiritualism, probably in 1847, until the notorious seance at Ealing conducted by D. D. Home in 1855, which she and Browning attended. Chapter Three will produce further evidence of Elizabeth's continuing interest in the subject from then until her death in 1861, followed by an attempt to offer suggestions for her great interest and belief in Spiritualism, and for Browning's aversion both to the subject and to D. D. Home himself.

It was in Florence, in 1847, that Elizabeth Barrett Browning probably first heard about the subject of Spiritualistic phenomena (Taplin, p. 235), although she already knew something of other branches of the occult (see Chapter Three). However, when the Brownings' were living in Florence, Elizabeth met and made the acquaintance of the American expatriot sculptor Hiram Powers (see Chapter One, note Twenty). Soon their friendship deepened, mainly because of their common interest in Swedenborgianism and Spiritualism. Elizabeth wrote to her sister on November 30/31, 1852, that she took great comfort from the company "of Powers, the sculptor ... who has 'made up his mind', he tells me, upon the truth of the American rapping spirits" (Letters to her Sister, p. 173).

It was some time later that she first mentioned the subject of Spiritualism, because in the late 1840's her interest can still only have been superficial. As William Irvine and Park Honan note: "During their Paris sojourn in the fall of 1852, she had first become definitely interested in spiritualism"(1). It was while in Paris that Elizabeth discussed spirit-rapping with Lady Elgin(2). From the

beginning, Elizabeth seems to have been convinced of the authenticity of most Spiritualistic phenomena. Eagerly she read articles and books relating to the subject as they appeared, and discussed the issue with her friends. She was "in a state of high expectation just now" and was certain that "wonderful things will soon be learnt" (Taplin, p. 256, quoting from a letter written by Elizabeth to her sister Arabel on January 13, 1852, in the Berg Collection; see introductory note).

In 1852 Elizabeth crossed to England where she participated in table-tilting experiments with Browning, Frederick Tennyson and Robert Lytton (Porter, pp. 41-42, quoting from a letter to Arabel dated April 30, 1853, in the Berg Collection). While in London she met many old friends and made a number of new acquaintances, including a notable spiritualist, Mrs. Newton Crosland(3).

Returning to Florence, Elizabeth deepened her friendship with Robert Lytton, then an attaché stationed at the British legation in Florence. Elizabeth was "particularly attracted to him through their common interest in Spiritualism" (Taplin, p. 269), and she wrote to her sister Henrietta on November 30/31, 1852, of Robert Lytton: "... as he is a seer of visions, a great supernaturalist, I shall comfort myself greatly in his society" (Letters to her Sister, p. 173). As Aurelia Brooks Harlan observes: "This common interest in spiritualism seems first to have served to cement the close friendship between Lytton and Mrs. Browning"(4).

Another friend was Frederick Tennyson (1807-1898), who occasionally visited the Brownings at their home at Casa Guidi, to engage in table-turning experiments. He wrote of Elizabeth:

> Mrs. B-- is a little unpretending woman, yet full of power, and, what is far better, loving-kindness; and never so happy as when she can get into the thick of mysterious

> Clairvoyants, Rappists, Ecstatics, and Swedenborgians. Only think of their having lived full five years at Florence with all these virtues hidden in a bushel to me!(5)

Frederick Tennyson had an artist friend named Augustus Brotherton, who lived in Rome with his wife Mary. According to Hugh J. Schonfield, Mary Brotherton "had suddently developed the power of automatic writing" (Letters to F.T., p. 99). This fact, Schonfield states, was first revealed in a letter from the Brothertons to Frederick Tennyson, written in February 1854, while "Thackeray's two daughters had already experimented successfully" (ibid)(6).

Mrs. Brotherton was at first highly sceptical of the practice of automatic writing (Letters to F. T. p. 100), but decided to proceed with an experiment. To her astonishment, the pen moved and began to write words in English and in Greek - a language with which she claimed to be unacquainted. She immediately informed both Frederick Tennyson and Thomas Westwood(7) of her experiences, and the latter, in turn, conveyed this information to Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Soon, Mrs. Brotherton and Elizabeth were corresponding, and Elizabeth wrote of Mrs. Brotherton to Thomas Westwood on February2, 1854:

> She sends me Greek (of which she does not know a single character), written by her, or rather through her; mystical Greek, from a spirit-world, produced by her hands, she herself not knowing what she writes. The character is beautifully written, and the separate words are generally correct - such words as 'Christ', 'God', 'tears', 'blood', 'tempest', 'see', 'thunder', 'calm', 'morning', 'sun', 'joy'. No grammatical construction hitherto, but a significant sort of grouping of the separate words, as if the meaning were struggling out into coherence. My idea is that she is being exercised in the language, in the character, in order to fuller

expression hereafter (Letters to F.T., p. 100)

Thackeray too mentioned Mrs. Brotherton's 'automatic writing' in a letter to Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth, dated January 25/28, 1854:

> Mrs. Brotherton has got to writing Greek now she says. Have the girls told you of their table-turning and involuntary -writing experiments? Only when you come to examine the wonders, they won't stand looking at but fly - like my blue devils (Thackeray Letters, III, 338).

Thackeray's attitude here seems objectively restrained. Mrs. Brotherton's claims are, at first sight, impressive, but, indeed "they won't stand looking at". One would ask why 'spirits' should choose to express themselves in Greek; if it were to prove their existence (through the mediumship of one unacquainted with that language) then it needs to be explained why they could not manage to write grammatically, and with a more versatile vocabulary. It seems more likely that Mary Brotherton was lying - either about not knowing Greek, or about having written these messages 'automatically'. However, it is to be assumed that her friends - Tennyson, Elizabeth, Westwood - knew her and trusted her, in which case an explanation based on self-deception on her part would be kinder and more acceptable. It is, indeed, possible that Mrs. Brotherton was in communion with spiritual spheres, or exercising some inner psychic faculty, but it seems more likely that she may have been receiving, telepathically, the theological thoughts or speculations of some living scholar of her acquaintance. If we are to accept her statement that these messages were not produced consciously by her, then the most likely explanation is that, without a full knowledge of Greek, she was producing Greek words which she had absorbed into her sub-conscious mind either from her own reading of theological works, or from the conversations of others involved in

theological or ecclesiastical matters - for example, from the scholarly sermons which she may have heard preached by clerics; it could be argued that the Greek words listed by Elizabeth as having been written 'through' Mary Brotherton, could be said to have a marked scriptural, even an eschatological, significance, or could be derived from typical Biblical imagery drawn from nature or geography. At any rate, whatever the basis of Mrs. Brotherton's 'mediumship', it is clear that she did not pursue the subject for long: Hugh J. Schonfield states that "Mrs. Brotherton soon gave up automatic writing as she found it made her head ache severely" (Letters to F.T, p. 101)

In July 1853 at Lytton's villa on Bellosguardo hill, south of the Arno, the Brownings attended a reception where Hiram Powers, Frederick Tennyson and Pasquale Villari - professor of history at Florence - were also present. It seems that Spiritualism was a major topic of conversation, and that all present, except Browning, were believers (Taplin, p. 272). It seems, therefore, that as early as this Browning was notably sceptical in his attitude towards the phenomenon.

Elizabeth also came to know William Westmore Story(8), another American expatriot sculptor, who was also a poet and a lawyer, and his wife Emelyn. Elizabeth described Story in a letter to her sister dated August 30, 1853, as "a sculptor, poet, lawyer, mover of tables, and (he) wears an enormous beard" (Letters to her Sister, p. 193). She had much to say regarding his claims to be a competent medium able to move tables, and wrote to Henrietta on July 26, 1853: "Mr. Story told us some curious things which had happened at Rome. He himself can move tables, he says, yes, and men: but I shall see tomorrow" (Letters to her Sister, p. 190). But on the following day, July 27, Elizabeth wrote disappointingly of his visit:

> He did not try the tables - moved a book, very unsatisfactorily, because a push would have done the same -

'wrote' - what he 'thought might be out of his own mind'. Said I to him, 'I can't believe you, if you don't believe yourself' (Letters to her Sister, p. 191)

Story's feeble attempts here to emulate the mediumship of other more successful practitioners is typical of those who, borne in the wake of a fashionable 'craze', try to demonstrate their own capacity by exercising some attributes in which the chief exponents of that craze excel. Of more interest than Story's own mediumship is his relationship with Home.

In the autumn of 1853, the Brownings moved to Rome. Here Elizabeth met yet another American expatriot artist, the painter William Page(9), a man "to whom she was attracted because of his interest in spiritualism and Swedenborgianism (Taplin, p. 277). Elizabeth was ill during the winter of 1853-4, and, during the evenings, Browning frequently used to attend functions and receptions to which both of them had been invited, on his own. On one particular occasion, she wrote to her sister Henrietta of a social evening where there was musical entertainment: "Robert went, and I stayed at home with Mr. Page the American artist, to talk spiritualism..," (Letters to her Sister, p. 197, letter dated December 30, 1853).

In the spring of 1854, the Brownings returned to Florence. One resident of the city, the American art critic James Jackson Jarves(10), was a close friend of Elizabeth's. Again, it would seem that the relationship was certainly strengthened by a mutual interest in Spiritualism, a factor which would appear to have played an important role in many of Elizabeth's relationships and friendships at this time. In Jarves' case, his interest in Spiritualism "served as a bond between him and Elizabeth" (Taplin, p. 283). Elizabeth wrote to her sister

Arabel of a sensational seance which Jarves reported to have attended in London under Home's mediumship:

> With no visible intervention, a table turned upon its edge with the lamp on it remaining upright all the while; many kinds of raps spelled out messages; spiritual hands 'softer and more thrilling than any woman's' knotted his tie, played an accordion, or untied a woman's apron strings and 'in an undulating gliding movement' carried the apron across the room (Taplin, p. 284, quoting from a letter dated May 15, 1855, in the Berg Collection).

Elizabeth accepted Jarves' testimony without question on this occasion, it would seem, and similarly when Jarves brought to her at Casa Guidi "some 'perfectly legible' writing made by the spirits themselves 'without the medication of any mortal fingers'" (Taplin, p. 284, quoting a letter from Elizabeth to Arabel dated October 21, 1854, in the Berg Collection).

However, whenever Browning entered the room Elizabeth and Jarves immediately changed the conversation to a different subject. It would seem that at this stage, therefore, before the Brownings had met Home and experienced the so-called 'Ealing Seance', Elizabeth's upsurging enthusiasm and interest were countered by Browning's increasingly firm disapproval and, no doubt, his impatience with many of these apparently trivial phenomena.

Elizabeth also came into contact with the eccentric English antiquarian and artist Seymour Kirkup(11), whom William Irvine and Park Honan justifiably describe as "the most fantastic of Elizabeth's spiritualistic friends" (Irvine and Honan, p. 324). Frances Power Cobbe declared that Kirkup was "an old man with long white beard and glittering

eye, the nearest approach to an ancient wizard that well might be conceived"(12).

Kirkup dabbled in the occult, and his story is at once laughable for its absurdity, and pathetic for the picture it presents of a foolish old man duped by his Italian maid, Regina Ronti. Regina claimed to be a medium and to have communication with the spirit of Dante. A year or so before her death in 1856 at the age of nineteen, she bore Kirkup a daughter named Imogene, who later deceived her father just as her mother had done, with messages from Dante and some of his so-called (spiritual companions'.

Thomas Adolphus Trollope (see Chapter One) detested Imogene and her exploitation of the gullible old man, her father, of whom he wrote: "during his latter years the old man absolutely and entirely lived, in every respect, according to the advice and dictates of 'the spirits', as oracularly delivered by Imogene" (What I Remember, I, 386).

It was after having witnessed one of Imogene's "attempts at legerdemain" (What I Remember, I, 387), that Trollope, his wife, sister-in-law and one Colonel Bowen attempted a table-turning experiment themselves, of which Trollope wrote:

> So, on reaching home, we took a table - rather a remarkable one (for its heaviness in relation to its size). Well, in a minute or two the table began to move very unmistakably. We were startled, and began to think that the ladies' dresses must have, unconsciously to them, pressed against it. We stood back therefore, taking care that nothing but the tips of our fingers touched the table. It still moved! (ibid).

The company concluded that the phenomenon was due to some form

of "unconscious exertion of muscular force" (ibid). However:

> Finally, we suspended our fingers about an inch or so above the surface of the table, taking the utmost care to touch it in no way whatever. The table still turned, and that to such an extent that, entirely untouched, it turned itself over, and fell to the ground (ibid).

There would appear to be no easy explanation for these events, other than the fact that Trollope was lying or that, swept along by the excitment of the phenomenon, the company unconsciously pushed the table over. However, even if the movements of the table had a purely 'scientific' basis, originating in some power emanating from the human body (a frequently-used explanation for this sort of occurrence), then that, certainly, would have little to do with the existence or otherwise of so-called 'spirits'. Elsewhere, as we have seen, Trollope appears, for the most part, comparitively objective in his observations relating to spiritualistic phenomena - to the extent that he declared of these earlier comments: "I gave, I think, upon the whole a rather unfavourable impression of the genuineness of the phenomena I recorded" (What I Remember, III, 281), and he accordingly described other table-turning experiments which he considered to be of a more 'convincing' nature (What I Remember, III, 282-3).

Returning to the subject of Seymour Kirkup and Imogene, however, Trollope expressed surprise that the old man was so dependent upon Imogene's spirits and manifestations, in view of the fact that, as we have seen, Elizabeth Barrett Browning observed, Kirkup "had for many years ... entertained and professed the most thorough persuasion of the futility and absurdity of all belief that the soul of man survived material death" (What I Remember, I, 388). Yet here was Kirkup, Trollope observed, declaring under the influence of Regina Ronti and Imogene, his "new faith in the existence of a soul in man"

(What I Remember, I, 389).

It would appear, from what else is known of the eccentric Kirkup, that his new-found spiritual dependence was due to senility, in the same way that Robert Dale Owen's increasing interest in Spiritualism towards the end of his life was due more to encroaching insanity (intensified, again, by the distressing fraudulence which he encountered in his investigations), than to a more healthily philosophically speculative frame of mind found in some ageing thinkers. Trollope seems to have deplored more than anything else not Kirkup's belief in spirits, but his total subjection to the insidious Imogene. For Trollope, the final indication of Kirkup's moral and intellectual degradation occurred when, after a residence of many years in Florence, the city he loved deeply "Imogene one day announced that 'the spirits' declared that he must go and live in Leghorn!" (What I Remember, I, 389). Pathetically, the old man "meekly and unhesitatingly obeyed" (ibid). It would seem, according to Trollope's indignant observation, that Imogene had a lover resident in Leghorn.

When Seymour Kirkup discovered in Elizabeth Barrett Browning a kindred mind with regard to the subject of Spiritualism - at least, in terms of the possibility of communicating with the dead and not (it would appear), in the indisputable authenticity of Imogene's mediumship - he told her some extraordinary stories. One of them, for example:

> was of some rings and crosses he placed on the inside sill of an open window, high over the Arno, in an uninhabited room, carefully locking the door and putting a straw inside the lock so that he could later tell whether any one had tampered with it. When he returned the next day, the lock was untouched; yet the deposit had disappeared. Three days later he went to the room again,

found the lock intact and the materials mysteriously restored. Browning and Trollope went to the apartment, saw that the locks had been properly sealed, and could suggest no explanation except for a fastened door behind a bookcase which could not be moved. Browning was not sure in which direction the door opened; but if inwards, Elizabeth concluded it was indeed 'the work of spirits'. Robert, however, believed Kirkup was a 'humbug' (Taplin, p. 285, quoting from a letter of Elizabeth's to Arabel dated January 25, 1857, in the Berg Collection).

The possibility of Imogene's having had a duplicate key to the room, and having observed carefully her father's manner of 'sealing' the lock with straw, seems not to have occurred to Kirkup - though no doubt it did to Browning and Trollope, who were perhaps wary of bringing the truth to Kirkup's notice at his advanced and mentally vulnerable stage of life. Such anecdotes appear trivial and absurd, but they do present the more extreme form of spiritualistic investigation, an interest which clearly affected many of Elizabeth's friendships and indicate the degree of her own involvement in the phenomenon, in that she considered all of the claims and stories brought to her notice by the people she knew - without necessarily concluding the truth or validity of every case presented to her.

The Brownings returned to London in 1855, and it was then that Elizabeth experienced her most controversial involvement in Spiritualism - the so-called 'Ealing seance', conducted by D. D. Home. It was largely this notorious seance which provoked the deepest anger and hostility of Browning towards both Spiritualism and the person of D. D.Home. This seance was - and, indeed, continues to be - one of

the most widely discussed occult sessions of the nineteenth century.

On July 23, 1855, the Brownings proceeded to 'Ealing Villa', at Ealing, the home of a wealthy solicitor named John Rymer. At the invitation of the Rymer family, who were deeply interested in Spiritualism and convinced of the validity of the phenomena which they had witnessed, Home had withdrawn to the house to escape the attentions of London high society, which had been clamouring to attend his séances soon after he had begun to hold them in London shortly after arriving from America earlier that year. The Rymers were close friends of Anna Jameson who, in turn, was a friend of Elizabeth's. It was here, during the evening, that the séance took place, and where:

> In the midst of this tranquil family atmosphere, in a house whose french windows opened onto green lawns and leafy trees, Robert Browning saw for the first time the man who was to inspire in him a notorious and all-absorbing enmity(13).

The séance, in brief, exhibited all the usual characteristics of Home's sessions - table-rappings, table-tilting and levitation, the appearance of so-called spirit hands, the playing of an accordion by spirits, bell-ringing, the agitation of the sitters' garments, direct-voice phenomena (that is, the so-called utterance of a spirit's voice through the mouth of an entranced medium), and the rapping-out of messages by means of an alphabet. However, the most notorious event which took place at the séance was the uplifting by the 'spirits' from a nearby table, of a floral wreath woven earlier during the day by the Rymer children in the garden of the house, and the placing of this wreath, by 'spirit hands' on Elizabeth's head - as if in tribute to her poetic genius.

Because of the important role played by this séance in the Brownings' dealings with Spiritualism, it would be useful to reproduce both Browning's and Elizabeth's contrasting accounts of the events which occurred, in order to explain precisely what was involved in the séance itself, what it was that incurred Browning's anger so profoundly, while convincing his wife, and, finally, to consider what the events were which caused the subsequent stormy controversy. These letters, accordingly, are reproduced in the Appendix at the end of the study, following the conclusion.

Browning's letter, relating in great detail the events which took place at the séance (Appendix, letter I), was written to an American friend, Mrs. Elizabeth C. Kinney (1810-1889), from 13, Dorset Place, London, on July 25, 1855 - only two days after the séance. Mrs. Kinney had been as violently opposed to Spiritualism as Browning until, later in that year, she herself encountered Home's mediumship (14). At the time of Browning's letter, she was, perhaps, still hostile towards the phenomenon. This letter forms part of the Browning Collection in the library at Yale University; in it, besides describing the various phenomena at the séance, Browning made suggestions as to how the medium could have produced his 'effects', testified to the complete honesty and integrity of the Rymers, and assailed the character and bearing of Home, whom he evidently considered a weak, affected figure, feigning innocence, demureness and gentleness. Browning clearly had no patience with Home's profession of bodily weakness, and pronounced him of probably normal physical strength. It is clear, however, that Home was indeed ill with consumption.

As far as can be ascertained, Elizabeth did not send any letter to Mrs. Kinney which can be said to have stated in comparable detail to Browning's letter what exactly occurred at this seance. Elizabeth's

account appeared in a letter written to her sister Henrietta on August 17, 1855 (Appendix, letter II). The letter is not so much a contrasting account to Browning's from the point of view of the events which occurred at the séance, but from the point of view of the writer's conviction as to the truth of what took place. As Browning stated in his letter to Mrs. Kinney, Elizabeth believed in all of the phenomena except the trance, and her position here is expressed in her letter to Henrietta. Only the relevant section of this letter is quoted in the Appendix; the letter is published in Letters to her Sister, pp. 219-221. In it she referred also to some séances which the Lyttons had attended with Home at the Rymers, two days before the séance attended by the Brownings. Elizabeth apparently enclosed Robert Lytton's account of what he and his father had observed, in her letter to Henrietta.

Although the two letters do contrast in that Elizabeth's was written from a stand-point of scepticism, it is not entirely true that, as Betty Miller claims: "Elizabeth's account ... differed in all respects from Browning's" (Séance at Ealing, p. 320). In the facts of what occurred the letters do correspond (for example, feeling the 'touch' of spirit-hands, hearing the raps and the music, seeing the table move, the hands materialise, the occurrence of the trance, the lifting and placing of the wreath on Elizabeth's head), although it will be noted that Elizabeth's is far less detailed than Browning's. In their opinions regarding the unconvincing nature of Home's 'trance' too, the letters agree; in their basic attitudes to the phenomena witnessed, however, it is evident that the writers conflicted.

It should be noted that, as Betty Miller indicates, whereas Browning's account was written down two days after the séance, Elizabeth did not record her own observations until nearly a month later. That this was so can be detected from the letters themselves,

regardless of their dating (which places Browning's as having been written soon after the events which it describes), for Browning's reads as a detailed step-by-step account of the occurrences, Elizabeth's more as a brief list of the phenomena observed.

Neither were these two letters the final expression of the Brownings' opinions upon the subject of Spiritualism. As Betty Miller observes:

> The division between husband and wife on the subject of spiritualism was now, less than a month after the séance, total. This schism is confirmed by the existence of two letters, one from Robert, the other from Elizabeth, written on the same day, and despatched in the same envelope (Séance at Ealing, p. 320).

These two letters were written to a Miss de Gaudrion (15), and both are dated August 30, 1855. The relevant sections of each letter are reproduced in the Appendix (Letters III and IV).

Elizabeth's letter, then, reaffirmed her belief in Home's integrity, whereas, on the other hand, as Betty Miller asserts:

> Browning's imperious note, written in the third person, reveals not only how deep the rift had become between husband and wife, but how far Browning himself had travelled from his own early and comparitively unprejudiced impressions of the seance. Despite the formality of the note, the tone is so brusque and emotional, that it is difficult not to believe that Browning was addressing, not Miss de Gaudrion alone, but also that obstinate, deluded and beloved woman, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, his wife (Séance at Ealing, p. 320).

Betty Miller rightly proceeds to indicate the contrast between the rather wary attitude of Browning's first letter, and the envenomed tone of the second, which reveals how his hostility had intensified even between late July, when the séance occurred, and the end of

August, 1855, when the second letter was written (Séance at Ealing, p. 321).

It appears that, a few days after the seance, Browning was so dissatisfied with what he had seen that he asked Mrs. Rymer if she would arrange for Home to conduct another seance at her house to which he, Browning, would be invited. Mrs. Rymer refused this request because of other pressing engagements, although, as Browning stated in his letter to Mrs. Kinney, since his scepticism regarding the phenomena (and his hostility towards Home personally too, perhaps) was now known to the circle, he doubted if his request would have been met in any case. Shortly afterwards, however, Mrs. Rymer and her son visited the Brownings' apartment, and brought Home with them. When Browning met William Allingham several years later, and lunched with him, he told Allingham about that subsequent meeting between himself and Home, and Allingham recorded Browning's account in his Diary, on Thursday, June 30, 1864:

> Having witnessed a seance of Home's, at the house of a friend of B's, Browning was openly called upon to give his frank opinion on what had passed, in presence of Home and the company, upon which he declared with emphasis that so impudent a piece of imposture he never saw before in all his life, and so took his leave. Next day Browning's servant came into his room with a visitor's card, and close behind the visitor himself - no other than Mr. Home, who advanced with a cordial smile and right hand outstretched in amity. He bore no ill will - not he! Browning looked sternly at him (as he is very capable of doing) and pointing to the open door, not far from which is rather a steep staircase, said - 'If you are not out of that door in half a minute I'll fling you down the stairs'. Home attempted some expostulation,

but B moved towards him, and the medium disappeared with as much grace as he could manage. 'And now comes the best of it all' said B - 'What do you suppose he says of me? - You'd never guess. He says to everybody, "How Browning hates me! - and how I love him." He further explains B's animosity as arising out of a seance at Florence, where a 'spirit wreath' was placed on Mrs. Browning's head, and none on her husband's(16).

Allingham appears, however, to have confused the Ealing seance (where the wreath was placed on Elizabeth's head), with other seances held in Florence by Home, who proceeded to the continent after his sojourn in London.

However, regarding that subsequent meeting between Home and Browning, the medium claimed to be able to shed an entirely different light upon the events that occurred when he, Mrs. Rymer and her son went to visit Browning: Browning greeted Mrs. Rymer and Mr. Wilkie Rymer, refused to shake hands with the medium but "with a tragic air, he threw his hand on his left shoulder, and stalked away"(17). Elizabeth, who was standing in the middle of the room looked, according to Home "very pale and agitated" (ibid). She placed both of her hands in Home's, he asserted, and said: "Oh, dear Mr. Home, do not, do not blame me. I am so sorry, but I am not to blame" (ibid). Browning then expressed to Mrs. Rymer his disapproval of the events which he had witnessed at her house, and asked her why she had refused him a second seance as he had requested. Home attempted to answer for Mrs. Rymer, and Browning told him to remain silent (Spiritual Mag, p. 317). Home, supported by Mrs. Rymer, declared that he was entitled to defend himself, at which point Browning's face became "pallid with rage, and his movements, as he swayed backwards and forwards on his chair, were

like those of a maniac" (ibid). Home resolved to leave the room, and as he did so he shook hands with Elizabeth, who repeated: "Dear, Mr. Home, I am not to blame. Oh, dear! oh, dear!"(ibid).

Home made a further statement to his wife regarding the 'Ealing séance,' asserting that "Mr. Browning was requested to investigate everything as it occurred, and he availed himself freely of the invitation" (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, p. 55). Regarding the wreath, Home declared that Browning had "expressed no disbelief" (ibid), and had stood behind Elizabeth's chair as the wreath approached her. Home also stated that "several times during the evening, he voluntarily and earnestly declared that anything like imposture was out of the question" (ibid). Madame Home added her own final comment on the proceedings at Ealing, declaring: "Would that Mr. Browning had seized the hands he saw at Ealing, whose action, in placing a wreath on the brow of his wife, and omitting to crown his own, may possibly have given him deep offence" (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, p. 54)

Madame Home, however, clearly cannot be regarded as an unbiased commentator on these events, and it is natural too to suppose that Home would have done his utmost to defend his own position. It was some years later that Browning produced his poem Mr. Sludge the Medium, a denunciatory satire on spiritualistic mediumship, with Mr. Sludge modelled upon Home (see Chapter Three). Meanwhile, however, Home and Spiritualism continued to be a subject of disagreement between Browning and Elizabeth - though not, perhaps, of contention. Granted that the Brownings held totally contrasting views concerning both the 'Ealing séance' and the phenomenon of Spiritualism itself, it is difficult to imagine that there occurred quite the degree of domestic argument that Betty Miller seems to imply. As Gardner B. Taplin suggests: "It is not true ... that the Brownings quarrelled between themselves about spiritualism and the notorious Home" (Taplin, p. 296). After the

'Ealing seance' Elizabeth took her 'spirit wreath' home and hung it on her dressing glass; when it had almost withered, Browning tossed it through the window into the street, expressing dismay for Elizabeth's having kept it (Taplin, p. 296, referring to a letter from Elizabeth to Mrs. Jameson, January 9, 1857). This kind of incident serves to illustrate the degree to which Browning was prepared to tolerate Elizabeth's pursuit of her spiritualistic interests, despite his own personal disapproval: he did not forbid her to keep the wreath, nor did he stage a culminating 'show-down' with her regarding her initial intention of keeping the wreath. There is evidence to suggest that the subject was left without a final resolution in their relationship, since both of them realised that they held totally different, opposing opinions regarding the phenomenon, and that constant discussion of it would be fruitless (Taplin, p. 296; Letters to her Sister, pp. 225, 249). It is clear too that Elizabeth and others, when speaking of Spiritualism would change the subject of their conversation upon Browning's entry into the room, and that she instructed her correspondents not to mention the phenomenon in their future letters (Letters to her Sister, p. 219), since presumably she and Browning shared the correspondence which they received. It is also probable that, in view of Browning's interest in religion and transcendentalism, he was not totally opposed to all considerations and discussions relating to 'spiritual' matters, but, on the contrary, interested to participate in such conversation. As has been seen, he was not disinterested in Spiritualism himself in the early days of Elizabeth's investigations - though always sceptical to some degree or other. It is to be assumed too that he would not have gone to Ealing Villa purely in a mood of suspended antagonism, but if not to observe the proceedings with total objectivity, then at the most hopeful of perceiving (tactfully, since he was present

at a private family gathering) the nature of the medium's techniques and methods. (As he revealed in his letter to Mrs. Kinney, he was indeed interested in the technicalities of how the phenomena could have been produced, and had opinions as to how the medium's 'performance' could have been improved, and how he would conduct the proceedings if he were "setting up for a 'medium'").

It is also likely that, in view of Elizabeth's frequent illness and delicate, sensitive temperament, that Browning would have been more concerned to mollify the woman he loved, than to bludgeon her with frequent tirades about her gullibility and delusion. In this respect, it will be remembered that during her lifetime, he came eventually to acquiesce more or less entirely with regard to Elizabeth's feminization of their son 'Pen', whom she dressed in frocks and whose hair she allowed to grow inordinately long (Taplin, pp. 224, 254-5, 286, 388), although Browning himself clearly disapproved in essence with this method of rearing the child: only four days after Elizabeth's funeral he cut Pen's hair and dressed him in long trousers (Taplin, p. 404). Similarly, one would suspect, with Spiritualism, it is more likely that, after Browning realised that he would not be able to shake Elizabeth's belief in Home's mediumship and in Spiritualism, he ceased to argue with her and left her to pursue the subject for herself - though retaining his own opinions, expressing them to others when requested to do so, and insisting that, in their home, the subject should not be brought before their notice.

More will be said of the possible basis of Elizabeth's belief in Spiritualism, and of Browning's strong hostility towards the phenomenon and to Home, in the following chapter.

Notes to Chapter Two

(1) William Irvine and Park Honan: The Book, the Ring and the Poet, a biography of Robert Browning (New York, 1974), p. 306. Later cited as'Irvine and Honan'.

(2) Lady Elgin, a close friend of the Brownings at that time, was the widow of Thomas Bruce, Seventh Earl of Elgin (1766-1841), who was responsible for removing the Elgin marbles from Greece. Lady Elizabeth Elgin, his second wife, whom he married in 1810, was the daughter of J. T. Oswald, M.P. for Dunnikeir, Fife. She died in Paris in 1860.

(3) Taplin, p. 263

Mrs. Newton Crosland was Camilla Dufour Toulmin (1812-1895), miscellaneous writer. In 1848 she married Newton Crosland, author of Apparitions, a new theory (1856). She began to investigate Spiritualism in 1854 and became a convinced believer. Her Light in the Valley: My Experiences of Spiritualism (1857), recorded her observations and conclusions, but incurred widespread public scorn. She also wrote novels and poetry, and translated some of Hugo's plays.

(4) Aurelia Brooks Harlan: Owen Meredith, a critical biography (Columbia University Press 1946), p. 49

(5) Letters to Frederick Tennyson, ed. Hugh J. Schonfield (London 1930), p. 99. Later cited as 'Letters to F.T'

Frederick, his brother Alfred and Alfred Tennyson's wife Emily, were all interested in Spiritualism at one time.

Frederick first became interested in the phenomenon in Florence, when:

> "(possibly under the influence of Mrs. Browning), [he] became greatly interested in the teachings of

> Swedenborg and the phenomena of spiritualism ... At first he was apt to speak rather lightly of spirit revelations, [Tennyson and his friends, ed. Hallam, Lord Tennyson (London, 1911), p. 44].

Frederick, indeed, wrote to Alfred in 1852 of Hiram Powers' angelic visions:

> God speaks to the heart of man by His Spirit, not thro table legs; the miracles of Christ were of inestimable worth, but these unfortunate ghosts either drivel like schoolgirls, or bounce out at once into the most shameful falsehoods (Tennyson and his friends, pp. 44-45).

However: "It was not long before he became a complete convert to Swedenborgianism and firmly convinced of the reality of the Spiritualistic phenomena" (ibid). Frederick Tennyson, it seems, believed that "spirits communicated with himself by a kind of electrical ticking, which he was constantly hearing in his room at night" (Tennyson and his friends, p. 46). He investigated automatic writing, which he abandoned as unreliable, but "remained ... convinced of the fact that living men were able to communicate with the spirits of the departed" (ibid).

It would appear that Frederick Tennyson's belief in the phenomenon was related to other beliefs which he held of a metaphysical nature, including belief in the Second Coming of Christ, and the end of the world.

As far as Alfred Tennyson is concerned, Lady Tennyson recorded in her Journal on July 16, 1868, of her husband:

> The Longfellows and he talked much of Spiritualism, for he was greatly interested in that subject, but he suspended his judgement, and thought that, if in such manifestations there is anything 'Pucks, not the

spirits of dead men, reveal themselves', [Hallam Lord Tennyson: Alfred Lord Tennyson, A Memoir (London, 1897), II, 56].

Hallam recorded how, twenty years later, he and his father visited Frederick Tennyson in Jersey, where they discovered of Frederick: "My uncle had grown more of a spiritualist than ever, believing in table-rapping" (Alfred Lord Tennyson, A Memoir, II, 342). At this meeting in 1887, Alfred coolly and dispassionately answered the enthusiastic Frederick in the same words used by the latter when expressing his own early misgivings regarding Spiritualism. Hallam recorded:

> A lively discussion took place between him and my father about these so-called revelations. My father spoke after this fashion: 'I grant you that spiritualism must not be judged by its quacks: but I am convinced that God and the ghosts of men would choose something other than mere table-legs thro' which to speak to the heart of man (ibid).

However, that Alfred hoped for evidence of human spiritual survival (a hope frustrated by the antics of fraudulent mediums) is made clear by Charles Tennyson who, describing Alfred's profound sense of bereavement following the death of Arthur Hallam, discusses how, in In Memoriam, Alfred Tennyson attempted to resolve his deep loss, [Six Tennyson Essays, (London, 1954) pp. 83-94]. Charles Tennyson continues:

> At one time Tennyson thought there might be a possibility of obtaining proof of the co-existence of the spiritual world by means of the psychic phenomena which excited an increasing amount of interest during

> the second half of the century ... he was apt to be rather scathing about the performances of mediums and seances (Six Tennyson Essays, p. 110)

Charles Tennyson also observes that both Alfred Tennyson and his wife Emily read Swedenborg's Heaven and Hell, [Alfred Tennyson (London, 1949) p. 303]. As far as Spiritualism was concerned, Emily Tennyson "regarded such trafficking with the supernatural as something akin to witchcraft" (Alfred Tennyson, p. 499), while Alfred, who studied the arguments regarding the phenomena with some ardour in 1865-7, became disillusioned with the methods used in spiritualistic circles (Alfred Tennyson, pp. 368, 499).

Frederick Tennyson, therefore, adhered firmly to belief in spiritualistic phenomena after his early scepticism, being, it would appear, of a seemingly metaphysical inclination. Alfred on the other hand - like D. G. Rossetti, perhaps - when faced with overwhelming bereavement in the loss of a loved one, explored the phenomenon hoping to discover hope in human survival of physical death but, like Rossetti, was disappointed in much of what he encountered.

As far as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882) was concerned, it would appear that, although he may indeed have enjoyed his discussion of Spiritualism with the Tennysons in July, 1868, he was himself by no means a believer. His attendance at spiritualistic seances seems to have gone no further than what he encountered in a very curious dream which he reported to J. T. Fields in a letter dated July 29, 1870, in which he

dreamed that he "went to a 'spiritual seance', and saw the 'medium' elongated - which I knew was true, because he was lifting his shoulders and standing on his toes", [Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, ed. Samuel Longfellow (London, 1886), III, 138]. Indeed, when the Association of Spiritualists offered him an honorary membership of their society, Longfellow's polite but curt reply was :

> Not being a Spiritualist in the usual and popular sense of the word - that is to say, never having seen any manifestations that convinced me of the presence of spirits - I should deem it almost an act of dishonesty on my part to accept the compliment you offer (Letter to Miss K----, January 15, 1875, Life of H. W. Longfellow, III, 229).

Indeed, Edward Wagenknecht, describing Spiritualism as "the most important of the marginal religious movements in Longfellow's time", asserts that "no mind so sensitive as his could have failed to take cognizance of it", [Longfellow: A Full-Length Portrait (London, 1955), p. 299], while stressing that Longfellow was unimpressed by a medium with whom he sat in 1857, (p. 300). Wagenknecht also describes how, in 1865 "one of the famous Fox sisters visited him and did some 'rappings'", (p. 301). Wagenknecht notes also Longfellow's discussion of Spiritualism with Tennyson in 1868, and his investigation of 'spirit drawings' (ibid), but refutes the rumoured conversion of Longfellow to Spiritualism following his wife's death; Wagenknecht dismisses this notion, saying: "I have found nothing to suggest this anywhere"(ibid).

Longfellow's brother Samuel Longfellow (1819-1892) was also present at the discussion between his brother and the Tennysons in 1868, and he recorded his observations in a letter written to Samuel Johnson on July 23, 1868, in which he wrote:

> They were speaking about spiritism, of which he (Tennyson) seemed quite incredulous, yet interested in hearing about it ... when some one said 'I see you are bitten by it', he replied 'No, I wish I could be bitten by something; but I always stay in suspense, neither believing nor unbelieving', [Memoirs and Letters, ed. J. May (Boston and New York, 1894), p. 239].

Twenty years earlier, Samuel Longfellow had himself discussed the so-called phenomena which occurred at Hydesville, Rochester through the Fox sisters' mediumship (see Chapter One), with Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882). Samuel Longfellow wrote of Emerson:

> Rochester spirit knockings he could not away with (as indeed who can?) and declared that 'Knockings were only for the Knockable'. He 'wouldn't hear them. If the good heaven comes down to earth, it shall at least be civil', (Memoirs and Letters, p. 128).

(6) Thackeray's two surviving daughters were Anne Isabella Thackeray (1837-1919), who married Sir Richmond Ritchie in 1877, and the younger, Harriet Marian Thackeray (1840-1875) who in 1867 married Sir Leslie Stephen, father - by a later, second marriage - of Virginia Woolf.

Thackeray himself attended one of Home's séances in America, in November 1852. Madame Home stated that Thackeray very carefully examined the séance-room beforehand (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, pp. 140-141), and she stated:

> Many years afterwards, a friend asked Home 'Who was the most sceptical enquirer you ever met?' And Home, without any hesitation, answered 'Thackeray'... I do not say that Thackeray ever got so far as to entertain the belief that the manifestations were produced by disembodied spirits. Most probably he did not(ibid).

Lionel Stevenson describes Thackeray's attendance at Home's séance:

> George Bancroft had invited the novelist to spend an evening at his house, and it turned out to be a spiritualistic séance conducted by Daniel Dunglas Home, then at the height of his fame. Thackeray was impressed by the messages rapped out by the table, of which the most coherent was 'I merely wished to say Makepeace you argue of importance'. During the next few days he tried several times to repeat the experiment, but without success, [The Showman of Vanity Fair (London, 1947), p. 263].

The fact that Home found Thackeray almost unmatched in the degree of his scepticism, marks out Thackeray as a refreshingly objective querent in contrast to the rather indiscriminately enthusiastic Frederick Tennyson. Thackeray expressed his observations in a letter written shortly after he had witnessed Home's mediumship. He wrote to Mrs. Elliot and Kate Perry, on November 28/December 1, 1852:

> Yes I have seen the Rappers, and the table moving, and heard the Spirits. The moving of tables in undoubted, the noises and knocks ... is of course dire humbug and imposture. They try to guess at something, and hit

or miss as may be ... It is a most dreary and foolish superstition. I dodged the Spirit by asking questions in Latin and German. [Letters and Private Papers, ed. G.N. Ray (London, 1946), III, 134]. Later cited as 'Thackeray Letters'.

Thackeray proceeded to express a common reaction to the phenomena witnessed - dismay at the duping of the good and honest by fraudulent mediums, contempt at the absurdity of the 'spirit messages' received - but awe at the physical manifestations reported:

> What pained me was to see kind good people believing - to find what folly satisfied them, what childish ideas of God they have. They call for their relations and Franklin and Washington ... But the physical manifestations are undoubted - Tables moving lifted up and men even lifted off the ground to the ceiling so some are ready to swear - but though I do not believe in this until I see it (ibid).

Thackeray's elder daughter Anne reported a conversation between the Brownings and her father, concerning the subject of Spiritualism:

> The first time I ever really recall Mr. Browning, he and my father and Mrs. Browning were discussing spiritualism in a very human and material fashion, each holding to their own point of view, and my sister and I sat by listening and silent. My father was always immensely interested by the stories told of spiritualism and table-turning, though he certainly scarcely believed half of them. Mrs. Browning believed, and Mr. Browning

was always irritated beyond patience by the subject, [Anne Ritchie: Records of Tennyson, Ruskin and Browning (London, 1892) p. 191].

(7) Thomas Westwood (1814-1888) was a poet and bibliographer. A friend of Charles Lamb, he published several volumes of poetry. He lived in Belgium from 1844 until his death, directing a railway company. He produced his Chronicle of the Compleat Angler in 1864.

His correspondence with Elizabeth began in January 1842, but their friendship waned after 1845.

(8) William Wetmore Story (1819-1895) settled in Rome in 1856, after when he devoted himself to sculpture, producing 'the Libyan Sibyl', now in the National Academy of Art, Washington, and 'Medea', in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Story developed a curious relationship with D. D.Home. Despite his spiritualistic pretensions, it seems that Story attempted to avoid involvement with Home when the latter arrived in Rome attempting to set himself up as a sculptor. Browning wrote to Isa Blagden on December 19, 1863:

> Hume went to Rome with a letter from Mr. Mitchell to Story, asking to become his pupil: Story refused, but got him a studio, conceiving himself bound to do so much by the letter: of course Hume immediately wrote to England ... that S had taken him as a pupil, [Dearest Isa: Robert Browning's letters to Isa Blagden, ed. E.C. McAleer (Austin, Texas, 1951), pp. 182-183]. Later cited as Dearest Isa.

Of Story's patronage of Home, Browning wrote sarcastically on November 26, 1863, to Mrs. Story, that her husband should

"keep Hume within the studio's bounds, and introduce him to the modelli if he wants improving company", [Browning to his American friends, letters between the Brownings, the Storys and J. R. Lowell, 1841-1890, ed. Gertrude Reese Hudson (New York, 1965), p. 132].

Henry James seems not to have considered Story's Spiritualism as worth mentioning when he wrote his William Wetmore Story and his friends, (Boston, 1903); or perhaps he thought Story's trivial attempt at table-turning and levitation required suppression. Similarly Mary E. Phillips chose to ignore Story's interest in the phenomenon in her Reminiscences of William Wetmore Story (Chicago and New York, 1897). Such omissions on the part of early biographers indicate the unfavourable light in which they regarded their subjects' interest in occult phenomena.

(9) William Page (1811-1885), lived in Florence and Rome from 1849-60, but died in New York. Besides portraiture, he produced 'Holy Family', now in the Boston Athenaeum, while his noted portrait of Browning (1854) is in Baylor University, Waco, Texas. Elizabeth wrote to Isa Blagden on August 24, 1853, that Page was "deep with the Spirits", and involved in automatic writing, ['New Letters from Mrs. Browning to Isa Blagden', ed. E.C. McAleer, Publications of the Modern Language Association of America (1951), LXVI, 599. Later cited as New Letters, EBB to Isa Blagden].

(10) James Jackson Jarves (1818-1888) was a miscellaneous writer who produced travel books and art criticism. He was also editor of The Polynesian, the first Hawaiian newspaper. His main interest was Italian painting; he amassed a large collection of Italian works of art, many of which are now owned by Yale University. Jarves' interest in Spiritualism had no doubt been encouraged by that of his family. His mother in particular

was an ardent believer in the phenomenon, and Francis Steegmuller describes how, in the early days of Home's mediumship in America, Home had been entertained at the Jarves', [The Two Lives of James Jackson Jarves (New Haven, Yale, 1951) p. 118]. It is even possible that the Jarves' paid Home's passage to England (ibid).

Jarves corresponded with Mrs. Trollope on the subject of Spiritualism (Steegmuller, pp. 138-139), and with Mrs. Browning (Steegmuller, pp. 138, 146, 196, 240). Both Ruskin and Longfellow clearly were to have met Home originally through Jarves. Ruskin wrote to Jarves on May 3, 1855 that"nothing could more interest me than any opportunity of witnessing what you describe" (Steegmuller, p. 140), but it seems that this particular engagement was not kept. Similarly, Longfellow wrote to Jarves on June 19, 1855: "... I was very sorry not to join your circle on Sunday evening. I am very desirous of seeing and hearing these mysteries" (Steegmuller, p. 146).

(11) Seymour Stocker Kirkup (1788-1880) was an artist and a friend of Blake. Ill-health caused him to move to Italy, and he lived in Florence and Rome. He led a notable literary circle in the former city. He collected a valuable library and produced notable portraits of Trelawny and John Scott. He was a student of Dante, and among those who found Giotto's lost portrait of Dante in 1846. He was characterised by his eccentric dress and habits. After the death of his mistress Regina Ronti, he married in 1875 a young girl sixty-five years his junior. He died in Leghorn.

Elizabeth revealed refreshing scepticism when she wrote to Kenyon in the winter of 1855-6 describing Kirkup's conversion to Spiritualism:

> Mr. Kirkup came to us ... and announced formally that he, having disbelieved in a future life and all things thereto appertaining, and having resolved to make no alteration in the negative of his creed without a special revelation to himself, had received it, abjured his incredulities absolutely ... His clairvoyante had had the rapping noises, and articulate voices - I heard it all rather coldly - you won't believe me, but I did ... I thought him a little hasty in concluding from the rap on the door which made him jump after the various evidences of life being sent down as inconclusive - raps all round (as it seems to me) against the crystal globed u/ universe - Hasty, that's all. He is not philosophical in putting his experiments, and Robert insists that the clairvoyante cheats. Not that Robert has heard any of the raps - And he settles everything by believing nothing, ever ... and is perfectly as 'hasty' on the other side. Still I don't feel sure of the Kirkup phenomena - I don't cite them to you as 'facts - no, nor as fictions (Letter in the Browning Collection, Harvard University).

When Nathaniel Hawthorne and his wife visited Italy in 1858, Mrs. Hawthorne recorded having been taken by Isa Blagden to visit "Mr. Kirkup, the antiquary, artist and magician" [Sophia A. Hawthorne: Notes in England and Italy (London, 1869), p. 473, entry for August 11, 1858].

Sophia Hawthorne referred also to the fact that Kirkup "lives with only a tiny daughter, a little dark-eyed fairy, just fit to be a daughter of a magician" (ibid). Her account

of Imogene's mediumship described how Kirkup's "little Imogene is a medium, so that he converses thro' her with dead emperors, and discovers how they have been poisoned and otherwise ill-treated while on earth" (Notes in England and Italy, p. 477. Later cited as Notes in England and Italy).

(12) Frances Power Cobbe: Italics (London, 1864), p. 395.

(13) Betty Miller: 'The Séance at Ealing, A Study in Memory and Imagination, Cornhill Magazine, Vol. 169, numbers 1009-14, Autumn 1956 - Winter 1957/8 pp. 317. Later cited as Séance at Ealing.

(14) Mrs. Kinney was the wife of the American minister at Turin. Elizabeth wrote to Henrietta on December 6, 1855 that Mrs. Kinney "used to be just as violent against the spirits as Robert ... and I have just had a long letter from her - to confess that she had been wrong" (Letters to her Sister, p. 237).

Elizabeth described Mrs. Kinney's violent antipathy towards Spiritualism, her exhortations to Robert "to 'find out the trick'... and 'expose' it" (ibid), and insistence that nobody of sane mind could endure the absurdities of the phenomenon. It would seem that Mrs. Kinney was converted by one of Hume's séances in Florence, at which "a Polish princess was communicated with in her own language" (ibid), and "the most private circumstances were referred to in messages from departed friends to the Kinneys and others" (ibid). Most imressively of all, it would appear, was the fact that the raps occurred on Mr. Kinney's knee, when everyone else present had their hands in sight "and the medium sat the farthest off" (ibid).

One wonders if, beyond feeling the raps produced by what Elizabeth enthusiastically described as "Another Hand - the spiritual!" (ibid), one wonders if Mr. Kinney ensured that

Home was not extending a rod from his far corner of the room, to produce the raps. Both the Kinneys, at any rate, concluded "after having witnessed and examined ... again and again and again ... that all trickery, as a solution, was utterly impossible" (ibid).

If, as one suggests, Browning communicated his account of the 'Ealing séance' to Mrs. Kinney because he considered her to be of a kindred mind regarding the phenomenon, then he must have been dismayed by this later conversion of his confidante, although he courageously conceded to the triumphant Elizabeth "that he esteems her more for her candour in writing this last letter" (ibid).

(15) Miss de Gaudrion later married a Mr. F. Merrifield, and it was he who, under the title of 'Browning on Spiritualism', later published these two letters in The TimesLiterary Supplement, Friday, November 28, 1902, p. 336.

It would seem that Mr. Merrifield and Miss de Gaudrion had, like the Brownings, attended one of Home's séances at the Rymers in July 1855. Mr. Merrifield described how they had spent:

> an evening ... at the house where Home was then staying, to which we were taken by friends, who were firm believers in the 'manifestations' there. As a result I had not the smallest doubt that the 'spirit hands' which we saw were material and a fraud. My wife formed a similar opinion, but knowing that others thought differently, and that Mrs. Browning had lately been there, she wrote to her, sending as an introduction an old letter from Miss Mitford, and received an answer, a copy of which, and of the spontaneous expression of

his opinion added by Mr. Browning, I subjoin (T.L.S., November 28, 1902, p. 336).

(16) William Allingham: Diary, ed. Geoffrey Grigson (London, 1967), pp. 101-2.

Allingham (1824-1889), an Irish poet, came to England and made the acquaintance of Leigh Hunt, Carlyle, Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelite circle. By profession a civil-servant, he published a considerable amount of poetry, retiring in 1870 to devote himself to writing, when he became editor of Fraser's Magazine.

(17) D. D. Home: 'Mr. Robert Browning on Spiritualism', The Spiritual Magazine, July 1, 1864, p. 316. Later references to the article are cited as Spiritual Mag.

Chapter Three: Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Later Involvement in Spiritualism 1855-1861, and an Analysis of her and Browning's Attitudes

The first part of this chapter is a continuation of the disccussion of Elizabeth's involvement in Spiritualism, following the 'Ealing séance', until her death in 1861. The second part is a detailed discussion of Browning's and her own attitudes towards the phenomenon, in which an attempt will be made to explain her profound and continuing interest in the subject, accounting for its motivation in terms of her personal life, and suggestions will be made for why Browning conceived an unrelenting hostility towards both Spiritualism and the person of D. D. Home, and how he expressed his feelings and impressions satirically in Mr. Sludge the Medium.

After the 'Ealing séance' of July 1855, that winter the Brownings travelled to Paris where they were visited by Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton and his son Robert Lytton, both of whom had had considerable experience of Spiritualism, and of Home's séances (see Chapter One). On this occasion, Elizabeth and the Lyttons discussed in detail the séance which the Lyttons had attended at 'Ealing Villa' two days before the Brownings had attended their séance there. Also present at the conversation in Paris, for part of the evening, was James Jackson Jarves (see Chapter Two, Note Ten).

It seems that during the séance which the Lyttons had attended at'Ealing Villa', Sir Edward, doubting the authenticity of the phenomena, had accused Home of deception and of producing 'spirit hands' which were in fact his own. At this Home, it seemed, had left the circle, crossed to the window and wept hysterically. When he had re-gained his self-control, he had returned to the table and placed both of his hands in one of Sir Edward's. With his other hand, Sir Edward insisted that he had then felt three different so-called 'spirit hands' - one

large and rough, like a sailor's, another smooth, delicate and feminine, and a third, a child's. Feeling for the arm beyond the wrist, Sir Edward had no doubt been horrified to discover that there was nothing there. This experience had convinced him - perhaps rather too readily and uncritically - of the validity of the phenomena. He also described how the 'spirits' had engaged in what seems extraordinarily absurd activities - producing water-colour paintings, and writing letters which they had then folded and placed in Sir Edward's hand. Robert Lytton then informed the assembled company of the sensation that Home was creating in Florence (where he had meanwhile journeyed). He was staying with the Trollopes, and Mrs. Trollope, it would appear, had sworn to having seen Home lifted high into the air during a séance, and whirled around the room (Taplin, p. 302, referring to a letter from Elizabeth to Arabel, dated October 31, 1855, in the Berg Collection).

As Sir Edward left the apartment he asked the Brownings to accompany him and his son to see a French girl conduct a séance the next morning. Elizabeth was greatly surprised that Browning both accepted, and encouraged his wife to go too. Accordingly the party of four visited the girl where they heard raps and witnessed what was supposedly writing produced by spirit hands. It seems curious that Browning should have encouraged Elizabeth to attend this séance; he cannot have hoped, one would suspect, that she would 'see the light' so soon after the 'Ealing séance'. It seems more likely that, having heard Sir Edward's solemn testimony to the validity of Home's mediumship, Browning was anxious himself to observe Sir Edward's own behaviour during a séance to ascertain the likelihood or otherwise of Sir Edward's potential for being duped during such occult sessions.

In 1856 the Brownings returned to England to spend the summer. During their visit, they attended a breakfast party at the home of

Monckton Milnes (1). Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864), who had been the American consul at Liverpool since 1853, was also present. Much of the conversation concerned Spiritualism, a subject which was raised again between the Hawthornes and the Brownings two years later, when the former visited Florence. Hawthorne wrote of Elizabeth's conversation at Monckton Milnes' breakfast-party:

> She introduced the subject of spiritualism, which, she says, interests her very much; indeed, she seems to be a believer. Her husband, she told me, utterly rejects the subject , and will not believe even in the outer manifestations, of which there is such overwhelming evidence (2).

They conversed of many mutual acquaintances, including the sculptor William Wetmore Story (see Chapter Two, Note Eight); Hawthorne wrote that Elizabeth had declared Story to be:

> ... much stirred up about Spiritualism. Really, I cannot help wondering that so fine a spirit as hers should not reject the matter, till, at least, it is forced upon her. But I like her very much - a great deal better than her poetry, which I could hardly suppose to have been written by such a quiet little person as she (ibid).

Later during 1856, the Brownings returned to Florence, where they encountered further talk of spiritualistic phenomena. One of Elizabeth's closest friends, Sophia Cottrell, whose baby had just died, told Elizabeth that she had held the infant's body in her lap for a quarter of an hour. Upon asking the child's spirit to give its hand to its father, the child responded (Letters to her Sister, p. 262, dated November 18, 1856). This morbid and rather gruesome anecdote was excelled by another, concerning the baby's father, Count Cottrell

(whom Elizabeth referred to as "a matter of fact man", ibid), who claimed to have seen a white, female hand, the arm below it, rise out of the ground, take a sheet of paper, and write upon it the claim that this was the hand of Hiram Powers' mother-in-law (ibid). It would seem that Browning, speaking of these stories, rather impatiently dismissed them as "the absurdity of people holding by such delusions" (ibid). Count Cottrell was sceptical enough to reject Home as a "worthless fellow" (ibid), and these two narratives surely illustrate less a case of absurd delusion than of the distressing despair experienced by the parents of a dead child, who, overwhelmed by their grief, were understandably anxious to receive proof of survival, although they were no doubt deceived in what they thought they had seen. Indeed, the intensity of their grief and loss may have resulted in their senses being misled following some temporary mental relapse.

These extraordinary stories relating to the Cottrells were only two of many which were then circulating in Florence after Home's arrival. At one of his séances, the medium had been bound in knots with ropes by the sitters, who had then observed that "the spirit-hands came and undid the knots before their eyes" (Letters to her Sister, p. 262). At another séance, the sitters had introduced an 'objective' observer underneath the séance-table, without Home's knowledge; but the phenomena had occurred nonetheless (ibid). On yet another occasion, the whole room had been shaken as if by an earthquake, and to such an extent "that everybody in it was sick" (ibid). It would be possible to explain each of these séances in an ordinary, earthly light: Home may have been an expert escapologist; the 'objective observer' may have been lying, deluded or paid by the medium to remain silent as to his techniques; the quaking of the room could have been due to the medium's having produced some form of minor explosion or detonation with saltpetre or gunpowder in the séance-room. However, these

explanations seem inadequate if one assumes that the observers were intelligent and, more important, alert to an increasing degree as Home's reputation, and his 'infallibility' spread. Indeed, as Elizabeth wrote to Henrietta, many concluded that they were simply unable to detect how Home operated: "Everybody would be delighted to disbelieve in Hume - but they can't. They hate him, and believe the facts" (ibid). Indeed, Madame Home referred to a report made in a Cincinnati newspaper in 1876 that Home had once been caught on a roof-top in Florence "setting up wires and affixing to them sponges prepared with phospherous" (Gift of D. D. Home, p. 202); presumably this equipment - if Home had indeed used it - would have caused some form of explosion which would have affected the rooms below. However, there exists no other account of Home having been discovered in this activity, and it is to be assumed that, had these events indeed occurred, then knowledge of the exposure would have been widespread, Home would have been completely disgraced, and his career would have ended abruptly. According to Madame Home, she had asked the Cincinnati journalist for the source of his story, and he had "contented himself with declaring that the story was not his, but that of Mr. Robert Browning" (ibid). Madame Home's conclusion was that the possibility of Browning having made such an accusation, totally without foundation, was "as apocryphal as the house-top, sponges, and wires themselves" (ibid).

Finally, Mrs. Kinney told Elizabeth of another séance of Home's in Florence at which a table had been raised and tilted so that a pencil on it had begun to nod off. Mrs. Kinney had put out her hand to catch it but it had stuck fast to the table, and could not be removed despite the force exerted by Mrs. Kinney in trying to pull the pencil away (Letters to her Sister, p. 263). In this instance one would speculate that a very powerful magnet was being used by Home to attach the pencil to the table. Again, however, it is to be assumed that the

intelligent and formerly sceptical Mrs. Kinney would have been alert to such a possibility - or if not she, then surely some other sitter present when this kind of phenomenon was manifested. Once more, the narrative is an example of the kind of anecdote relating to Home's mediumship which is inadequate in the bare, factual form in which it has been conveyed to us. Before condemning or exonerating Home, one would require more detail as to the circumstances surrounding the particular phenomenon described; this the enthusiastic Elizabeth rarely supplies.

In the spring of 1858 the Hawthornes visited Florence, where, as Julian Hawthorne recorded of his father: "Among his near neighbors during that summer ... were Mr. and Mrs. Robert Browning ... Mrs. Browning was at that time deeply interested in spiritualism" (3).

Nathaniel Hawthorne himself wrote of the subsequent meeting between the Hawthornes and the Brownings:

> There was no very noteworthy conversation; the most interesting topic being that disagreeable and now wearisome one of spiritual communications, as regards which Mrs. Browning is a believer, and her husband an infidel (4).

Indeed, as Mrs. Hawthorne recorded:

> Mr. Browning introduced the subject of spiritism, and there was an animated talk. Mr. Browning cannot believe, and Mrs. Browning cannot help believing (Notes in England and Italy, p. 346).

Nathaniel Hawthorne described in detail what Browning said about the 'Ealing séance' at this time, some three years after its occurrence. Hawthorne's account indicates that Browning had precise

ideas as to the source of the 'spiritualistic phenomena' which were produced through Home, ideas which were only vaguely hinted at when he wrote to Mrs. Kinney two days after the séance. Hawthorne wrote:

> Browning and his wife had both been present at a spiritual session held by Mr. Hume, and had seen and felt the unearthly hands, one of which had placed a laurel wreath on Mrs. Browning's head. Browning, however, avowed his belief that these hands were affixed to the feet of Mr. Hume, who lay extended in his chair, with his legs stretched far under the table. The marvellousness of the fact, as I have read of it, and heard it from other eye-witnesses, melted strangely away in his hearty gripe, and at the sharp touch of his logic; while his wife, ever and anon, put in a little gentle word of expostulation (French and Italian Notebooks, II, 14).

It seems, indeed, that Hawthorne shared Browning's scepticism towards Spiritualism, as he had already implied in his comment on the conversation which he had had with Elizabeth at Monckton Milnes' breakfast party in London (5). If Hawthorne was as opposed to Spiritualism and belief in it as was Browning, then this may explain why it was Browning who introduced the subject into their conversation, as asserted by Mrs. Hawthorne: probably Browning, by enlisting the support of an ally who held a similar view-point to his own on the phenomenon, helped to shake Elizabeth's belief in Home more strongly. There seems no other likely reason why Browning should have raised an issue which, on other occasions, he had little patience for.

One particular spiritualistic entanglement of Elizabeth's remains prominent for its distressing implications. For this reason

it is an interesting aspect of Elizabeth's involvement, demonstrating the more dangerous side of her spiritualistic investigations, revealing the exponents of the phenomenon at their worst, and emphasising the deplorable effects which the worst kind of 'spiritualist' had on her faith in human integrity as a whole, her faith in her own moral judgement and perception, and her view of herself an an intensely vulnerable individual. The person who caused Elizabeth this anguish was Sophia Eckley.

The Brownings first met the Eckleys, a wealthy American couple, in 1853 at Rome. For several years the Eckleys were very close friends of the Brownings. Mrs. Sophia Eckley was a minor poet (6). It is clear that she felt a devotion towards Elizabeth of total servility amounting to a neurotic obsession. She showered Elizabeth with expensive gifts, and could never bear to be parted from her for long. Spiritualism (as so often in Elizabeth's friendships, it would seem) was their "common interest" (Taplin, p. 356). During the early days of their friendship, it was under Mrs. Eckley's influence that Elizabeth attempted automatic writing (Porter, p. 58, quoting from the'Manuscript Letters to Sophia Eckley' in the Berg Collection). Mrs. Eckley was full of extraordinary tales concerning Spiritualism. She declared that she had heard sounds at church which had followed her to the communion table and were so loud that she was afraid that they had disturbed the rest of the congregation (Taplin, p. 356, quoting from Elizabeth's letters to Arabel in the Berg Collection, postmarked November 13th and 26, 1858, and March 6, 1859).

When the Eckleys discovered that the Brownings intended leaving Florence for Rome, late in 1858, Sophia Eckley was determined to accompany them. She therefore invited the Brownings to share her carriage with them; the Brownings accepted. Elizabeth wrote to

Arabel of the subsequent, remarkable journey: "Spirits made signs several times to Sophie and me on the journey" (Porter, pp. 60-61 , quoting from an unspecified letter in the Berg Collection). While in Rome, Elizabeth attended a séance during which she received written messages from spirits (Letters to her Sister, pp. 311-312, letter dated March 4, 1859). Of this séance Katherine H. Porter observes: "it is reasonable to suppose that Sophie was the medium" (Porter, p. 61). The Brownings left Rome in May, 1859, and returned to Florence - again, accompanied by the Eckleys.

However, Elizabeth's strong affection for Sophia Eckley, whose passion for and devotion to Elizabeth were evidently overwhelming and obsessive, came to an abrupt end during the winter of 1859-60. Mrs. Eckley had been almost a daily companion to Elizabeth for the previous two years (Taplin, p. 382), and that Christmas the Eckleys had showered the Brownings with elaborate and expensive gifts. However, the subject of Spiritualism, which had seemed to have bound them so closely together, providing, indeed, the very basis of their relationship, was the cause of their eventual sunderance. It appears that Mrs. Eckley, predictably enough, had been deceiving Elizabeth in her claims to powerful mediumship, to having received communications from the dead, and to having experienced all the spiritualistic phenomena which she had originally claimed to have done. Her motive in deceiving Elizabeth would seem to have been her desire to gain and keep the friendship of the famous poet. Throughout, Browning had suspected her sincerity and had warned Elizabeth against her - to no avail. Now, as Elizabeth came to understand the fullness of Mrs. Eckley's treachery and falsehood, she was deeply hurt and offended, and irritated too by her former friend's letters begging for forgiveness (Taplin, p. 383).

Browning gave an example of Mrs. Eckley's treacherous

fraudulence in a letter he wrote to Isa Blagden on April 19, 1869, in which he said of Mrs. Eckley:

> ... she cheated Ba from the beginning - and, I say, in the bitterness of the truth, that Ba deserved it for shutting her eyes and stopping her ears as she determinedly did. I was hardly interested enough in the old dead miserable nonsense to see if Mrs. E would stand up for its ever having been alive: but I just put a question or two - with the result I expected. I asked about a story I knew she had told Ba - and myself too - and she at once said - at the mere mention of a name and before hearing what it referred to, 'Oh I never heard the story before, - somebody else told her, not I!' - so I left off trying how carrion smells if you put your nose to it (Dearest Isa, p. 314).

Elizabeth's poem Where's Agnes?, which appeared in her volume Last Poems (1862), concerns Mrs. Eckley's treachery. This work will be discussed fully in Chapter Seven, when that volume is analysed in detail.

After the exposure of Mrs. Eckley, she and her husband had no further contact with the Brownings; but it seems that, several years later, after Elizabeth's death, Browning met Mrs. Eckley again and succeeded in shaming her into some form of genuine repentance, for he wrote to Julia Wedgwood on January 21, 1869:

> ... 'Agnes' ('Where's Agnes?') chose to call on me the other day - I had not seen her for seven years: my wife would not, or could not, know her, and suffered miserably through her ignorance: in half an hour I gained a victory which, could my wife have hoped, ever, to do, would have made

> her happy indeed - and which she could have gained by no effort that I can imagine: it was as easy to me as 'kiss my hand' - and not altogether unlike it (7).

Another notable figure who discussed the subject of Spiritualism with Elizabeth was the American Unitarian minister Theodore Parker (1810-1860), an impressive orator and scholar who had energetically championed a number of unpopular, progressive causes, being both a liberal in his political and theological thinking. Parker had travelled to Italy after a long, successful ministry, vainly attempting to regain his health. It seems that, although Elizabeth regarded him as a noble character, they disagreed upon the subject of religion. From their conversations, Elizabeth concluded that Unitarianism was a negative creed, while Parker, although she found him an impressive speaker, disappointed Elizabeth because he "placed no credence in the recent 'spiritualistic' phenomena" (Taplin, p. 387). However, from a letter which Elizabeth wrote to Isa Blagden on May 10, 1860, it seems that, at one time, Parker had held firmer beliefs in the truth of Spiritualism:

> I asked his opinion ... on the subject of spiritualism. He believed a great deal in the trance and clairvoyant facts, but resolved them into the nightside of human nature in the body, excluding the supposition of another plane of being. He believed in the honesty of David and Cora Hatch, for instance. Mr. Hazard told me that this belief went much father at one time ... Spiritualism had taken strong and extensive hold upon his congregation ... which may have naturally made him timid and averse (8).

Perhaps it would be too much here to accuse Elizabeth of triumphantly attributing Parker's changed belief in the phenomenon in a

rather mean-spirited way to the fact that Spiritualism had challenged his authority in his own church. Nevertheless, some spiritualists attempted to account for the opposition of many orthodox churchmen to the phenomenon (with justification in some cases, no doubt) in these terms, ignoring other objections to the subject which these churchmen may have held. In Parker's case, however, it is likely that, in view of his unconventional attitudes and beliefs, he would not have hesitated to endorse Spiritualism had he believed in its validity, while a man of his intelligence and powers of oratory would no doubt have been able to cope with his congregation's interest in the phenomenon, either by guiding them away from it or by incorporating its fundamental principles into his own doctrinal stand-point.

In 1860, when the Brownings were in Rome, they received a visit from Harriet Beecher Stowe, who had visited the Brownings before during her previous tour of Europe in 1857. This time, however, it would appear that she and Elizabeth had more in common. As Hazel Harrod observes, Elizabeth's "interest in communication with spirits had been quickened by the death of her father; Mrs. Stowe's loss of her son Henry had given her a similar interest" (9). When they met, therefore:"the two women talked about spiritualism" (Taplin, p. 352).

After the meeting, on November 20, 1860, Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote a letter to Elizabeth declaring that a friend of her deceased son, named Haywood, had received messages from Henry Stowe. Haywood, it would appear, entertained "skepticism on all spiritualism" (Harrod, p. 31), but was prevailed upon by another friend to visit a medium. The medium, when entranced, had proceeded to adopt "the peculiar characteristic air, manner and mode of speaking" of Henry Stowe (ibid), who, it seems, was speaking through the medium. In this manner, 'Henry Stowe' spoke to Haywood "for <u>two hours</u>" (Harrod, p. 32), during which the former

unmistakably revealed his presence by talking "on all branches and particulars of most private confidential affairs in which they two alone had been involved" (ibid). By speaking "with the most perfect knowledge of names, dates, and places and persons and with all Henry's peculiar turns of thought and expression," the medium had proved to the satisfaction of Haywood and Mrs. Stowe that communication had been made with the spirit of Henry Stowe. Henry had declared of the after-life that "at first he was not happy - that that unhappiness soon however passed away and he was now constantly becoming happier" (ibid).

Such so-called indications of spiritual survival apart, however, it is evident that Mrs. Stowe adhered to a profound intuitive sense of such survival. She informed Elizabeth that she did:

> ... at times have that vague shadowy sense of the presence of spirits beloved, especially in great trouble and perplexity which is at any rate a comfort to me. The state is not imagination - not under the control of my will - but brings a conviction of real presence at times quite vivid (Harrod, pp. 32-33).

Similarly, prior to the news of Haywood having 'made contact' with the spirit of Henry Stowe, Mrs. Stowe had written to her husband, from Florence, on January 16, 1860, of being troubled by thoughts of Henry:

> Since I have been in Florence, I have been distressed by inexpressible yearnings after him, - such sighings and outbreakings, with a sense of utter darkness and separation, not only from him but from all spiritual communion with God (Life of H. B. Stowe, p. 350).

It is therefore reasonable to assume that Mrs. Stowe interpreted her son's 'contact' with Haywood as an indication to herself not to surrender to despair and agnosticism. One would wish for more

detail of these séances attended by Haywood, however. Assuming that he was not lying to Mrs. Stowe (even if for the best motives, to raise her from her despair by falsely claiming to have contacted Henry Stowe), it is possible that, in his own deep sense of loss and anguish at the death of his friend, he was not immune to being deluded. It is indeed remarkable that this medium appeared to be under the influence of an entity identical to Henry Stowe in terms of expressions, 'turns of thought', and knowledge of persons and events known only to Haywood and Stowe. However, one would wish to know more of the unknown friend who introduced Haywood to the medium. Had he, perhaps, provided the medium with the information required to falsify convincingly the person of Henry Stowe? If this were so then the question remains as to how a medium, even provided with such information, could project a personality able to deceive the closest and most intimate friend of that personality. Again, a possible answer to this problem lies in the degree of Haywood's distress at Henry Stowe's death and the extent of his emotional and mental vulnerability.

Three days after Mrs. Stowe wrote to Elizabeth relating the details of Haywood's 'contact' with Henry Stowe, Elizabeth's sister Henrietta died (November 23, 1860). When Elizabeth received the news of Henrietta's death, followed by the arrival of Mrs. Stowe's letter, she wrote to Arabel that:

> Mrs. Stowe's letter had done her more good than anything else which had happened to her since Henrietta's death, and she copied out extracts from it and sent them to her sister in an attempt to convince her of 'the truth' (Taplin, p. 393, quoting a letter in the Berg Collection postmarked January 14, 1861).

Later that year, on March 14, 1861, Elizabeth wrote a letter to Mrs. Stowe in which she expressed her most developed view on the subject of Spiritualism:

> I don't know how people can keep up their prejudices against spiritualism with tears in their eyes, - how they are not, at least, thrown on the 'wish that it might be true', and the investigation of the phenomena, by that abrupt shutting in their faces of the door of death, which shuts them out from the sight of their beloved. My tendency is to beat up against it like a crying child. Not that this emotional impulse is the best for turning the key and obtaining safe conclusions, - no (Life of H. B. Stowe, p. 356).

Only three months later, on June 29, 1861, Elizabeth herself died, and so, in view of the above letter to Mrs. Stowe, it is clear that Elizabeth never abandoned her spiritualistic beliefs. Many years later, 'Pen' Browning wrote a letter to The Times in which he referred to Mrs. Eckley's treachery, and asserted:

> towards the end of her life my mother's views on 'spiritual manifestations' were much modified. This change was brought about, in a great measure, by the discovery that she had been duped by a friend in whom she had blind faith. The pain of disillusion was great, but her eyes were opened and she saw clearly (10).

However, although, as has been described, Elizabeth was deeply grieved and hurt by the revelation of Mrs. Eckley's treachery, there seems to be little foundation for Pen's suggestion that Elizabeth's views on Spiritualism became "much modified". The late letter of Harriet Beecher Stowe is as expressive of the enthusiasm for Spiritualism

which Elizabeth held, as any of her previous pronouncements upon the subject, and it indicates as firm a belief in the validity of the phenomenon. No doubt in her last years she participated in fewer sensational séances than she had experienced in earlier times; it is possible too that the exposure of Mrs. Eckley made her more healthily wary of believing all that others told her of their spiritualistic experiences. As far as her "views" concerning the validity of the phenomenon itself were concerned, however, it would appear that these remained firm until the end of her life, and in so far as her views expressed to Mrs. Stowe can be taken as her most 'mature' statement on the subject, it would seem that, as Dorothy Hewlett suggests: "As she came nearer to her own end Elizabeth's interest in Spiritualism grew deeper" (11).

This aspect of Elizabeth's life has frequently been dismissed, ignored, played down or condemned in a superficially simplistic manner. As Gardner B. Taplin observes, many reviewers of the first edition of her letters, published in 1897: "regretted the iteration of her faith in Spiritualism" (Taplin, p. 414). The fact that she seems to have retained her belief in the basic validity of the phenomenon, to the end of her life, cannot be denied, however - and it is clear too that in the course of her spiritualistic experiences she seems to have investigated some of the more bizarre and fantastic aspects of the subject. What remains enigmatic, however, is not that she was a spiritualist, but the problem of determining what factors were responsible for her apparently profound and persistent belief in the phenomenon. An additional problem requiring resolution is why, on the other hand, Browning entertained such an extraordinarily vehement antipathy towards Spiritualism, mediums and, most important, the person of D. D. Home. These problems will now be explored.

First there is the problem of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Spiritualism: one aspect of her involvement cannot be resolved because the truth or falsehood of the phenomenon itself cannot be proved. Some mediums were fradulent, and were exposed; others, D.D. Home included, were never exposed, a fact which makes it difficult to determine the degree or otherwise of their fraudulence. Clearly, many séance phenomena were quite ridiculous and totally without any valid foundation whatsoever. Certainly, however, some events which indisputably occurred - the levitation, thought transference - cannot readily be explained without resorting to theories concerning human psychic faculties which have yet to be finally determined, and continue to be investigated; in any case, such theories are largely beyond the scope of this present study. One major issue concerning Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Spiritualism cannot, therefore, be resolved: whether she was a gullible adherent to a bogus and invalid creed, or a pioneer attempting to investigate a sphere of research which modern methods of scientific psychical research continue to study.

This apart, however, it is true that certain of Elizabeth's beliefs and pursuits cannot be justified in terms of their possible relation to a genuine area of research. For example, her naive acceptance of all that Sophia Eckley told her, her readiness to grant credibility to many of Seymour Kirkup's fantastic stories, her failure at times to distinguish between Home's genuine psychic qualities and other of his activities which seem to bear more than a superficial resemblance to the stock techniques of crude theatricality and stage escapology. How, then, can one explain her belief in, or her readiness to believe in phenomena which seem far less worthwhile than other aspects of Spiritualism? This question is especially important in view of the fact that one is not dealing with an unintelligent individual, but a woman of pronounced intellect, a classical scholar, a child prodigy and an artist of not

inconsiderably creative power (12). The problem is further made complex by Elizabeth's firm, orthodox Christian beliefs: whereas many members of the church, especially the Roman Catholic Church and evangelical sects, held and indeed continue to hold the view that spiritualistic mediumship is dangerous, if not a diabolic practice, Elizabeth appears to have been fully able to reconcile her Christianity,and her Spiritualism (13). Indeed, as Gardner B. Taplin asserts, Elizabeth "never lost her simple, orthodox Christian faith" (Taplin, p. 99).

Some critics have attempted to account for the degree of Elizabeth's involvement in Spiritualism. (Osbert Burdett rather sweepingly referred to it as an "almost hysterical interest", Burdett, p. 58), on the grounds that she had an extensive interest in occultism as a whole. For example, Maisie Ward seems to over-simplify Elizabeth's attitude, discussing Mesmerism and Spiritualism as if they were synonymous, confusing them (14), and observing in generalisation that Lady Elgin and Elizabeth were "at one about spiritualism, mesmerism, clairvoyance, visions and the like" (Ward, p. 200). Again, Gardner B. Taplin cites Elizabeth's earlier interest in Mesmerism and Swedenborgianism (15) as indications that "she was becoming more and more interested in the occult and the spiritualistic" (Taplin, p. 99).

Katherine H. Porter, more than any other critic, appears to be concerned to trace significant connections between Elizabeth's interest in Spiritualism and other branches of the occult - particularly, in Mesmerism and crystallomancy. With regard to the latter, Elizabeth wrote to Henrietta on July 23, 1852: "Next Wednesday we are to go to Mrs. Haworth's to meet Lord Stanhope and his crystal ball, which is some spiritual consolation to me" (Letters to her Sister, p. 165)(16).

Katherine Porter, however, observes that Elizabeth returned from her visit unconvinced by the validity of the clairvoyance -

though nonetheless interested in the phenomenon "as a sign of the times" (Porter, p. 40).

However, it is Elizabeth's early involvement in Mesmerism which Katherine Porter sees as most significant as far as Elizabeth's belief in Spiritualism is concerned. Asserting that "the road from mesmerism to spiritualism was an easy one" (Porter, p. 8), she traces Elizabeth's interest in Mesmerism from her early acquaintance with the phenomenon through the supposed mesmeric 'cure' experienced by Harriet Martineau in 1844 (Porter, p. 34). Noting Henrietta Moulton Barrett's Mesmeric experiments (Porter, p. 35), Katherine Porter justifiably observes that at this stage Elizabeth was a believer in Mesmerism, though the phenomenon frightened - even appalled her. However, as far as exploring Mesmerism was concerned, Katherine Porter perhaps mistakenly implies that Elizabeth's interest in investigating subjects such as Mesmerism was in part prompted by Browning's influence in urging her towards a more immediate experience of life, rather than her own esoteric metaphysical speculations, inspired by reading matter brought to her in the seclusion of her room in Wimpole Street in the days before her marriage (Porter, p. 35). She then, paradoxically, notes Browning's reservations towards Mesmerism, but concludes of Elizabeth that with her "background of interest in mesmerism, she came more easily to spiritualism" (Porter, p. 36).

There appears to be some confusion in Katherine Porter's analysis of Elizabeth's interest in the occult, and, especially, in Mesmerism. First, one should remember the danger ofconfusing different branches of occultism, and generalising that an interest or belief in one necessarily implies belief in <u>all</u> occult phenomena. It seems, in fact, that many who believed in Mesmerism, for instance, were totally opposed to Spiritualism, and vice versa; others appear to have entertained belief in both, but it would seem that, in the final event,

Elizabeth Barrett Browning cannot be counted among them (17).

Indeed, contrary to Katherine Porter's implication, although Browning may indeed have encouraged Elizabeth to explore the value of practical experience, it seems too contrived to suggest that this may have influenced her interest in Mesmerism - or that, in some tortuous way, it could have led her away from Mesmerism and towards the Spiritualism that Browning so strongly disapproved of. On the contrary, it is significant that Elizabeth's initial, enthusiastic interest in Mesmerism and in Harriet Martineau's mesmeric 'cure', soon waned under Browning's influence and developed into an attitude of wry amusement (18). Conversely, in the case of Spiritualism, Elizabeth's early enthusiasm developed into a profound belief in the phenomenon - a belief which was sustained despite years of Browning's deep hostility towards the subject; unlike his success in weakening Elizabeth's early enthusiasm for Mesmerism, Browning never managed to persuade her to reject her faith in the truth of Spiritualism.

Certainly, therefore, Elizabeth was interested in the occult; an intelligent and imaginative individual, clearly she would have been interested in all controversial issues of her age, and certainly the occult was one of these. However, it seems that one cannot attribute her belief in Spiritualism to a general predisposition towards occult phenomena: her interest in crystallomancy was no more than a passing phase, her enthusiasm for Mesmerism waned and died, while her Swedenborgianism cannot be divorced from her spiritualistic beliefs. How, then, can one account for her profound and enduring adherance to Spiritualism?

The answer to this issue appears to lie in Elizabeth's response to the deaths of her favourite brother , 'Bro' - Edward Barrett Moulton Barrett - who was drowned in a boating accident off Torquay

when she heard of the tragedy" (Taplin, p. 225).

Elizabeth's failing creative energy after the completion of Aurora Leigh is attributed by Taplin to the deaths of her friends Kenyon, in December 1856, and G. B. Hunter soon after. These deaths so shocked and distressed Elizabeth that they "depressed her spirits and sapped her strength" (Taplin, p. 348). Then followed the death of her father in April, 1857, that of her friend Mrs. Jameson in March, 1860 (Taplin, pp. 349, 382), and of her beloved sister Henrietta in November, 1860. Gardner B. Taplin describes the final announcement of the death of the ailing Henrietta as "a severe shock" (Taplin, p. 392), and he describes how, after it, Elizabeth did not leave her rooms in Rome, and would see no one. Finally, the death of her hero, the Italian patriot and unifier, Cavour, in 1861 "was a severe blow, which actually hastened her own death. She suffered as though from a personal bereavement and was struck down at a time when she had lost her powers of recuperation" (Taplin, p. 399).

It seems valid to suggest that a temperament so deeply disturbed by physical death, would incline both towards a hope of the survival of the individual after death, - a hope which Elizabeth would have found endorsed by her Christianity - and towards a willingness to explore and prove the likelihood of that survival through mediums and séances - as she did through her involvement in Spiritualism.

In addition to her unusually acute inability to adjust to the loss of loved ones and friends through death, there was her own languid temperament, based on her illnesses, her prolonged period of secluded invalidism prior to her elopement with Browning in 1846, and her frequent weakness - not to mention her four miscarriages. Her own nearness to death - or, at least, her lonely life of confinement and ill-health, possibly created in her a feeling that the transient

life of this world is a fleeting, weary experience. Perhaps this attitude, in turn, created in her a yearning for the life eternal - that immortality which seems to promise secure permanence, a blissful existence when all are, traditionally, reunited with those whom they have loved on this earth. Herein, perhaps, lies the origin of Elizabeth's hope in life-after-death and her wish to explore its possibilities; but here, too, is the reconciliation between her Christianity and her Spiritualism. Moreover, as far as Elizabeth's Christianity was concerned Katherine Porter sees an additional related reason for Elizabeth's interest in Spiritualism - "the ... hope of reclaiming man's spiritual self from materialism" (Porter, p. 138). Other critics appear to agree with this view (19).

As has already been suggested, the deaths which most distressed Elizabeth were those of her brother and father. In both instances it is likely that she experienced a measure of guilt concerning the loss of her relative. Her favourite brother, 'Bro', accompanied her to Torquay in the summer of 1838, for the sake of her ill-health. Later that summer, when the time came for him to return to London, Elizabeth was so depressed by the thought of his departure, that their father's permission for Bro to remain with her was sought, and granted. Bro stayed with Elizabeth until July, 1840, when he was drowned. Gardner B. Taplin describes his death as "the great tragedy of her life" (Taplin, p. 79). It is clear that she never fully recovered from the loss of Bro. and even as the immediate shock passed she experienced a "strong sense of guilt" (Taplin, p. 80). It is evident that she held herself responsible for Bro's death by having selfishly persuaded him to stay with her at Torquay when his natural inclination suggested a return to London (ibid). Blaming herself for his death, she was affected by it throughout the rest of her life: "Such was her morbid sensitivity that she could never utter Bro's name, not even to her

husband. She struck from her vocabulary the word 'Torquay' and always substituted the less specific 'Devonshire'" (Taplin, p. 81). Taplin proceeds to describe how other areas of her life were affected after Bro's death: attendance at chapel services inevitably resulted in her weeping and fainting as soon as familiar hymns which she had sung with Bro were played; ten years later, at Bagni di Lucca, when a friend benignly mentioned Bro's name, Elizabeth physically stumbled and had to prevent herself from falling; never again did she visit friends in Herefordshire, because the memories of her early, happy life there with Bro, were too traumatic (ibid). When she returned from Torquay to London, she was severely ill, because her nervous system "was so shattered by the tragedies at Torquay". (Taplin, p. 88). For a long time she relapsed into morbidity, declaring that her life had ended. It is evident, therefore, that the death of Bro disturbed Elizabeth so radically that one can hardly be surprised, it would seem, that she later developed such a keen interest in Spiritualism - at times, an enthusiasm apparently devoid of the rational judgement and dispassionate consideration one would expect in a person of her intelligence - and attempted to prove that the survival of those who die is a possibility, if not a certainty.

In a similar, though less intense vein, Elizabeth was deeply distressed by the death of her father. She loved him deeply, but the degree of his sternness, harshness and stubborn, autocratic nature, resulted in him cutting Elizabeth off completely after her elopement and marriage to Browning. He dealt similarly with each of his three 'wayward' children who dared to presume to the disloyalty of marrying and leaving his immediate dominion - Elizabeth, Henrietta and Alfred. After her marriage, Elizabeth was disinherited, and her father declared that for the rest of his life he would consider her as dead. Indeed,

he never saw her again (Taplin, pp. 183-4). He sent her letters back to her unopened (Taplin, pp. 187, 248), would not see her on any of her visits to England, and showed total indifference to his grandson Pen, whom he saw once by chance in his own house (Taplin, p. 297). Only as he approached his death did he declare that he had 'forgiven' his three disloyal children (Taplin, p. 350). At the time of her sister Henrietta's death, Elizabeth was in communication with Harriet Beecher Stowe, who, as we have seen, believed that her dead son had communicated with one of his friends. Elizabeth took some comfort from this, it seems - first because it gave her hope in the spiritual survival of her sister, but secondly because it gave her hope in the possibility of a 'reunion' with her father, who had died three years earlier. Once again, it seems that, having been severed in this life from an unrelenting father, Elizabeth may have been hoping that he was not lost to her for eternity, by his own death. She may well have looked forward to the time when, after her own death, she and her father might experience some form of spiritual reconciliation. This, too, seems to be a valid explanation for why she was attracted to Spiritualism, believed in its promises, and adhered to that belief towards the end of her life with even greater conviction which would appear to have been the case, as her statements to Mrs. Stowe seem to suggest.

However, it seems that Elizabeth never attempted to establish contact with the 'spirits' of either her brother or her father, to learn that they still existed, understood her, loved and forgave her, and looked to her renunion with them. Katherine H. Porter rather hastily deduces from this that it was <u>not</u> the personal loss of loved ones which prompted Elizabeth's belief. She says of Elizabeth and others: "Personal bereavement, which at the present time probably leads as an incentive among the followers of spiritualism, attracted no

one of the group here considered to the belief" (Porter, p. 137)

However, it seems unreasonable to conclude that, simply because Elizabeth did not attempt to contact her loved ones, that this indicates that she did not wish to do so. For reasons given above, it seems likely that personal bereavement was the main factor in Elizabeth's attraction towards Spiritualism. Why, then, did she not attempt to contact Bro or Mr. Barrett? First, it is evident from what we have seen that Elizabeth believed in the existence of the spirits, but mistrusted their messages; she believed in the truth of survival, but retained some reservations about what was said in séances by those claiming to have survived; she wrote to Henrietta that she mistrusted the so-called spiritual communications received by Seymour Kirkup (Letters to her Sister, pp. 212-3), and, more important, at the 'Ealing séance' she dismissed Home's trance-utterances not as fraudulence on his part, but as probable "prodigious nonsense" on the part of the 'spirits' (Letters to her Sister, p. 220).

Secondly, she may have longed to believe in the existence of 'spirits' but dreaded discovering that, specifically, her brother and father were unable to communicate with her. While taking consolation from the evidence she believed she had obtained in favour of survival, the most important related factor from her point of view - the survival of her brother and father - may have been so vital to her peace of mind that, curiously, she shrank from any definite proof which might suggest that they had not survived. While there remained the unfathomed ultimate question - could her loved ones communicate with her? - there was hope: any definite attempt to, for instance, 'conjure up' Bro was unthinkable because it might prove disappointing, a possibility which Elizabeth could not face being realised.

Thirdly, she may well have feared what her deceased relatives

might communicate to her if they did do so. She entertained guilt feelings towards both her brother, whose death she believed she had indirectly caused, and towards her father, who castigated her with accusations of disloyalty. However much she may have believed that the spiritual state is a reconciliatory one of forgiveness, peaceful accord and harmony, she may still have retained some guilty fearfulness concerning what those whom she believed she had wronged might have to say to her now.

Finally, while there is no evidence that Elizabeth specifically sought communication with her own 'spirits', there is some evidence to suggest that she at least awaited, hopefully, for messages from them. She wrote to Henrietta on August 30, 1853, of the spirits: "they won't communicate with me - no - oh, I wish they would" (Letters to her Sister, p. 194). More than simply longing for any spiritual communications, however, it is of great significance that, when reporting the 'Ealing séance' to her sister, Elizabeth implied that she had anticipated a possible message from a common acquaintance (a brother, perhaps?) at this séance with ostensibly the most 'powerful' medium of all. She wrote that she "felt convinced in my own mind that no spirit belonging to me was present on the occasion" (Letters to her Sister, p. 220). That Elizabeth never sought to contact the spirits of those whom she had loved and lost, is clear; but that she awaited and hoped for them to come to her, seems highly probable.

The second major problem relating to the Browning's involvement in Spiritualism concerns the extraordinarily passionate and angry reaction which Browning experienced towards the phenomenon in general, and, specifically, towards mediums; most intense of all was his hatred for D. D.Home.

That Browning felt a deep antipathy towards Home following the 'Ealing séance', has already been noted. However, the degree of

that antipathy was expressed by him in unusually virulent terms: for example, he referred to Home as a "dung ball" and as "vermin" in two letters written to Isa Blagden, dated 19 December 1863, and April 19, 1865 (Dearest Isa, pp. 183, 214 respectively). Again, it seems that Browning was not altogether entirely factual in relating his dealings with Home. When Pen Browning wrote his letter to The Times Literary Supplement in December, 1902, declaring that his mother's spiritualistic beliefs were greatly modified in later life (a letter already discussed in this Chapter), he added the following extraordinary assertion:

> Mr. Hume ... was detected 'in a vulgar fraud', for I have heard my father repeatedly describe how he caught hold of his foot under the table (Pen Browning, p. 365).

This statement, it would appear, can be given no credence whatsoever: as we saw in Chapter One, the fame of D. D. Home as the most reknowned spiritualistic medium of all time rests substantially upon his reputation of never having been exposed or caught out. Frequently, people at his séances did observe the actions of his hands and feet beneath the séance table, some, as has been described, threw themselves beneath it, or hid beneath it, and swore that its levitation was not due to any apparent physical activity on the part of the weak, consumptive Home, while others touched and investigated the materialised 'spirit hands'. Sir William Crookes and his equipment failed to detect a fraudulent reason for Home's mediumship. Had Browning indeed exposed Home, as Pen's letter asserts that Browning claimed he had, then the whole of interested society would have known of the exposure and Home could never have proceeded as successfully as he did after his acquaintance with Browning. Certainly, Browning never exposed Home. As Jean Burton asserts: "There is no evidence ... that, during his long career, Home was ever

exposed as an imposter, or privately detected in trickery" (Burton, p. 30). Indeed, as Betty Miller observes of Browning's 'claim' to have exposed Home:

> ... if Browning had indeed caught Home in the act of cheating, he would triumphantly have proclaimed the fact in his letters to Mrs. Kinney and Miss de Gaudrion alike. He did not do so, because nothing of the sort took place (Séance at Ealing, p. 324).

On the contrary, as Betty Miller also states, there is evidence to suggest that Browning knew only too well that he had not exposed Home. She indicates a passage in Frank Podmore's Modern Spiritualism (1902), in which Podmore:

> stated that Browning had personally explained to F.W.H. Myers, one of the founders of the Society for Psychical Research, that he had never detected Home cheating, and that the only definite evidence he could show for his opinion that Home was an imposter was based on a second-hand rumour that Home was once caught in Italy experimenting with phosphorous (Séance at Ealing, p. 323).

Even Madame Home, who can hardly be considered as the most objective commentator upon her husband's career, was at least correct when she declared: "Perhaps none of the thousand falsehoods circulated concerning Mr. Home has been more persistently repeated than the assertion that he was found cheating by Mr. Robert Browning" (D. D. Home, Life and Mission, p. 52).

Browning's intense hatred for Home, therefore, seems - according to Pen Browning - to have resulted in him even, at times, claiming to have exposed Home. Such a claim clearly cannot be upheld, however.

Therefore, one is faced with the problem of how Browning's falsehood can be explained in view of the fact that, as Betty Miller declares: "However strong his hatred of Home, Browning ... would not knowingly have told a lie" (ibid). Betty Miller's solution to the problem seems a little doubtful; it will be discussed shortly.

For the moment, however, let us attempt to determine why Browning should have conceived such an all-consuming hatred for themedium. It may well be that, although he was unable to indicate the flaw in Home's mediumship, or to expose him, he genuinely believed that Home was fraudulent; for this reason he may have detested Home on moral grounds, for deceitfully exploiting those who believed in him. Certainly it was for this reason, as we have seen, that Browning so disliked Mrs. Eckley - and, as Gardner B. Taplin asserts, James Jackson Jarves who, together with Home and Mrs. Eckley, Browning apparently suspected of having taken "advantage of her [Elizabeth's] innocence" (Taplin, p. 383) (20). Specifically, Browning may have been outraged by what he suspected as the spiritualists' taking advantage of the grief-stricken bereaved, among whom, as has been seen, Elizabeth was certainly to be counted. It is true that Home never accepted money from his sitters (see Chapter One), but the social prestige and, more important, the spiritual power which he obtained over many bereaved mourners (the Rymers, perhaps, or his adopted mother, Mrs. Lyon), was considerable.

It may be that Browning objected to Home not only on moral grounds, but also intellectually, for ensnaring - as he, Browning, thought - the unintelligent and gullible. For Home himself had little of the intellectual standing which Browning might have respected, and Home's cleverness may in Browning's view have rested simply on his devious and insidious success in impressing the unintelligent with what (for Browning) amounted to a display of conjoring tricks and

theatrical escapologist techniques, which the gullible mistakenly accepted as valuable spiritual manifestations. This, again, may have been the source of Browning's irritation and impatience: he was disappointed and distressed that a woman of Elizabeth's intelligence - the woman whom he loved - was, due to her bereavements, rendered vulnerable and unable to detect what he saw as the intellectual flaws and failings in Home's 'mediumship', in the quality of his spiritual communications, his explanation of things which occurred in the séance-room, and his assertion that events which (for Browning) were crude tricks, were genuine spiritual phenomena. Finally, it may have been that Browning's objections to Home were on theological grounds, that the medium was defying scriptural instruction in attempting to commune with 'the other world', that he was dabbling in potentially dangerous phenomena, that he was degrading the true spiritual existence by declaring that disembodied souls, at one with their Creator, were clamouring to move tables, play accordions, rustle ladies' dresses, and deliver sentimental messages to the merely mortal loved ones whom they had left behind them. Browning's objections to Home, therefore, may have been moral, intellectual, and theological (21). Little credence, one feels, can be given to Home's assertion that Browning's antipathy towards him was based upon Browning's anger that, at the 'Ealing séance': "the wreath was not put upon his own head instead of his wife's" (22).

That Browning's objections led him to such a strong dislike, however, remains an enigma; in particular it seems impossible to explain his false claim, asserted by Pen, that he had exposed Home. Betty Miller goes to great lengths to account for Browning's 'falsehood'. She asserts that Browning was so deeply outraged by Home that "by an emotional sleight-of-hand which successfully deceived its own author", Browning's wish that he had exposed Home was transformed into the

belief that he had, indeed, done so (Séance at Ealing, p. 323). She proceeds to discuss how, in Browning's claim to have exposed Home: "fantasy is now inextricably confounded with fact" (Séance at Ealing, p. 324). Betty Miller's explanation is convenient but, again, it does itself leave too many questions unanswered, such as the likelihood of Browning really having believed his own wish-fulfilment fantasy that he had caught Home out, and the possibility that a man of Browning's calibre could have so completely lost his sense of the truth as to imagine that he had in fact done something which he had not. Both of these possibilities are rendered even more unlikely in view of the fact that there were many persons able to refute Browning's false claims. These are the weaknesses in Betty Miller's explanation, however convenient it seems at first sight.

It seems more probable that the responsibility for Browning's 'falsehood' lies not with Browning, but with his son. Possibly Pen misunderstood what his father had said, and mistakenly thought that Browning had claimed to have exposed Home when the poet had, perhaps, instead merely expressed the wish that he had exposed him, or the belief that Home should, or could, be exposed. Again, it is not unlikely that Pen himself was guilty of a falsehood. In attempting to uphold his mother's credibility, he had already - quite without foundation - minimised her later involvement in Spiritualism and conviction of its truth, as we saw earlier. Pen, therefore, would not be above asserting that his father had exposed Home when he in fact had not done so, or had claimed (falsely) to have exposed the medium.

The suggestion has been made that Browning's aversion to Home was based upon the medium's supposed homosexuality (see Chapter One). This is thought by some of Home's biographers to have been the cause of Home's expulsion from the French court. The noted spiritualist

Harry Price said the following of Browning's hatred for Home:

> Robert Browning was probably jealous of the attention paid by Home to his wife ... Dean Inge ... thinks that the poet's fury arose from the fact 'that his beloved wife had been, as he thought, taken in'. A third suggestion is that Home, alleged to have possessed homosexual tendencies, disgusted Browning on moral grounds (Harry Price: 'Foreword', Burton, pp. 29-30).

Similarly, as E.J. Dingwall observes of Browning's angry attitude towards Home:

> ... there was clearly something else that Browning knew about Home which excited him unduly... It was, I think, something that to-day we should take little notice of, but in those days was considered something very dreadful. Home was one of those individuals whose sexual inclinations were at times somewhat inverted. His friendships and dealings with young men were such as to arouse suspicion ... My own view ... is that Home was homosexually inclined but rarely, if ever, allowed his inclinations any practical expression (Dingwall, p. 107).

However, there is no definite evidence to suggest that Home was homosexual. On the contrary, his two marriages and fatherhood of children imply that he could, at the most, have been sexually orientated towards both sexes. As for his 'friendship with young men', in an age when the sexes were more rigidly separated by social etiquette and decorum, men and women had more frequently to resort to the companionship exclusively of their own sex. Moreover, at a time when less was known of homosexuality, concealed or overt, men and women were less self-conscious of expressing and demonstrating strong affection towards members of their own sex. Finally, the present age has seen many

attempts, some of them contrived, to detect homosexual identities in notable figures of the past, and for this reason also, a too hasty readiness to categorise Home as a homosexual should be treated with some caution.

Nevertheless, it is true that Browning, in reporting the 'Ealing séance' referred to what he described as certain "unmanlinesses" in Home which, in his view, were "in the worst taste". However, even if Home were homosexual, is it likely that Browning, any more than others who knew the medium, would be likely to know of his homosexuality? There are a number of other issues in this regard which require resolution: the likelihood of Browning, even if he had detected Home's homosexuality (in itself unproven), reacting with such aversion towards it; of him reacting to it with any aversion at all. There is no proof relating to Home's homosexuality, and it seems pointless to try to prove that Browning's aversion towards the medium depended upon a sexual preference which Home may not even have had.

There may well have been a psychological reason for Browning's hatred of Home, however. It would be natural for Browning to have felt some irritation concerning his wife's intense interest in another, younger man. It must be remembered, too, that Browning had in a sense 'rescued' Elizabeth from her father's domination, liberating her and enabling her to live as a free, self-determining and responsible individual. At the risk of over-simplifying her situation, it would be valid to indicate that, although Elizabeth loved her father deeply, her subjection to him throughout most of her adult life as well as her childhood, before she eloped with Browning, this subjection to him can be seen only as suppressive and oppressive. Browning had had to encourage her slowly to free herself from the situation in which she lived, under her father's domination, in order not only to make her

his wife, but also to give her the ability to develop as an individual - as an artist. It may well be, therefore, that he met with hostility any influence which Elizabeth encountered which threatened to subject her beneath its power. Having freed her from the autocracy of her upbringing and her father, Browning was therefore unlikely to accept the situation easily when, in D. D.Home and in Spiritualism, he came across a new force which succeeded in exercising a major influence over Elizabeth, and threatened, at times, to subject her completely beneath its control and authority. Moreover, in the last years of her life, if her Spiritualism were given added incentive due to her guilty reaction concerning the severance from her father, who then died, then Browning too may have felt a degree of guilt because he had indirectly caused the rift between Elizabeth and her father, by marrying her. When her guilt, following her father's death, intensified her spiritualistic enthusiasm, Browning may have transformed his guilt concerning Elizabeth, externalising it into a hatred for Spiritualism.

Herein, perhaps, lies the origin of Browning's hatred and aversion towards D. D. Home, added to which were the other possible factors already discussed - that is, his objection to the medium and his practices on intellectual, moral and theological grounds.

Whatever the origin of Browning's hostility towards Home may have been, that hostility was expressed in satiric and virulent terms in his poem Mr. Sludge the Medium. For this reason, it would be interesting to consider how Browning handled the subject of Spiritualism in his poetry. This will be the subject of the remainder of this chapter, and will lead to the important question of how Elizabeth handled the same theme in her own poetry. The latter, in turn, will be the preoccupation of the remaining four chapters of this study.

Apart from Mr. Sludge the Medium, Browning made other references to Spiritualism in his poetry. In the seventh stanza of 'A Lovers' Quarrel', for instance - one of the Men and Women series (1855), there occurs a reference to table-turning:

Try, will our table turn?
Lay your hands there light, and yearn
Till the yearning slips
Thro' the finger-tips
In a fire which a few discern,
And a very few feel burn,
And the rest, they may live and learn! (23).

The poet's thoughts are of the time prior to the quarrel when he and his lover were perfectly united. The concept of unity between the lovers is embodied in the image of table-turning: complete unity of purpose between the sitters at a séance was supposedly required for the 'levitation' of a table to occur. Therefore the successful turning of the table suggests that the sitters were in perfect spiritual union, and since they were lovers it is implied that they were co-existing in union in other respects as well - intellectual, emotional, sexual. Moreover, the psychic power exercised by the lover in the table-turning is seen by the poet as a demonstration of her sexuality, her passion, and therefore as further proof that, prior to the quarrel, she had loved him: for the lover is 'yearning' - on the symbolic level, yearning for the table to rise, but on the literal level, and in the poet's eyes, yearning for him. At the end of the stanza the image returns to convey an impression of the lovers' unity. The fact that the lover's (sexual) power is discerned by a few (l. 47), implicitly the poet among them, suggests that his ability to perceive her power

is indicative of some psychic bond between them - a bond which the quarrel, the subject of the poem, has ruptured. The image is successful, therefore, both in its indication of the unity between the lovers and in its suggestion of the lover's sexuality and passion. In view of the close relationship between Browning and Elizabeth, it is curious that he chose to make use of Spiritualism - a subject of dissension between them - as an image of the unity between two lovers. As W. C. de Vane asserted, it is interesting that spiritualistic phenomena, which caused "disagreement in their married lives should have been used for material in this poem" (De Vane, p. 192).

'Mr. Sludge the Medium' first appeared in Dramatis Personae (1864), but is thought to have been written in Florence in 1859-60, prior to Elizabeth's death in 1861, but after the 'Ealing séance' of 1855 and the Hawthornes' visit to the Brownings in 1858. Hawthorne discussed Spiritualism with his hosts on the latter occasion, as we have seen, and is mentioned in 'Mr. Sludge the Medium' (l. 1441).

Critics have consistently and unanimously agreed that Sludge was modelled upon D. D.Home (24). This seemingly obvious statement is nevertheless important because there is evidence from within the text that Browning's target may not have been mediums in general, but the specific person of Home. For example,the poem is set in Boston, Massachusetts, where Home was based before coming to London; Sludge's name - 'David' - is possibly the closest forename to Home's 'Daniel' that Browning could have chosen for his fictional medium; the poet refers to the rings on Sludge's fingers (l. 292), his pleading physical weakness and vulnerability (l. 1251), and his servile habit of kissing people's hands (l. 1494). All of these were characteristics of Home, whose collection of rings - many of them gifts from European royalty

- was reknowned. Browning referred to Home's pleading weakness and kissing people in his letter to Mrs. Kinney describing the 'Ealing séance'. Finally, Sludge's exposer refuses to shake hands with the medium (l. 1280), and is accused by Sludge of being consumed with passion (l. 1507). Similarly, at the subsequent meeting between Home and Browning, Browning refused to shake hands with Home, who later accused him of quaking with uncontrollable rage, as has been seen.

The opening of the poem is explosive and dramatic as the fraudulent medium who has been 'caught out' pleads and whines to be left unmasked by his exposer (25). The medium is guilty of despicable servility as he constantly addresses his exposer as 'sir', hoping thereby to flatter him and undercut his anger. Even now, Sludge tries to use his exposer's susceptibilities, by referring to the sitter's deceased mother, the manifestations of whose presence the medium has evidently been falsifying (ll. 5, 11 - 14, 20, 42 - 50).

The rest of the poem consists of the medium's self-defence. At first he admits his deceit, but claims that he was being influenced by an evil spirit:

> ... There's a thick
> Dusk undeveloped spirit (I've observed)
> Owes me a grudge - a negro's, I should say
> (ll. 30-32).

His next manoeuvre is to offer to explain his tricks to his exposer, if the latter will maintain silence (l. 55). It is a mark of the medium's astonishing audacity that, even at this point, he manages to talk his way towards the subject of receiving a fee for his bogus séance (ll. 65-74), and tries to obtain "a parting egg-nogg and cigar" (l. 77), from the man whom he has just tried to cheat, but who has exposed him.

In a long, circumulatory passage the medium then attempts to assert that the sitter, of all people, is responsible for Sludge's own fraudulence (ll. 84-164). This is because the public, including the sitter, are so arrogantly self-assertive and yet gullible upon the subject of supernatural phenomena (ll. 153-60). This attitude is therefore an encouragement to the bogus medium to exploit such people. This passage includes many effective lines, for example, the following, which occur when Sludge is contrasting the gullible reaction of the public when a servant-boy claims to have received spiritual visitations, contrasting this with their disbelief should he claim to be in possession of a large banknote:

> ... 'He picked it up,
> His cousin died and left it him by will,
> The President flung it to him, riding by,
> An actress trucked it for a curl of his hair,
> He dreamed of luck and found his shoe enriched,
> He dug up clay, and out of clay made gold'
> (ll. 109-114).

Such lines illustrate the richness of Sludge's metaphorical language, and are the means whereby the poet establishes our impression of the medium as an able and witty speaker; more will be said of this notion later.

Sludge tries to introduce various arguments to his defence of his fraudulence: his tricks brighten up spiritualistic circles, and stir the sitters into lively argument about the validity of phenomena seen (ll. 186-223). He asserts that the role of a medium is a highly responsible one which few men could adopt without eventually becoming corrupt. He maintains that séances, moreover, are as much an occasion for the clamourings, anticipations and interpretations

of voluble sitters, as they are opportunities for an artful medium to force bogus manifestations upon his sitters, while as far as fraudulent mediums are concerned, Sludge places responsibility firmly upon the shoulders of those patrons who declared the medium to be genuine (ll. 248-357).

Sludge describes how he escapes with his fraudulence by exaggerating the hysterical scepticism of his doubters, by skilfully conducting séances in which he manipulates his sitters' responses (dismissing his spiritual disclosures which turn out to be unfortunate guesses or blunders, securing from sitters the correct information about their deceased loved ones, and then subtly re-introducing this information as a spontaneous revelation, and so on), and by bewailing his enslavement at the hands of his sitters (ll. 357-403).

Sludge bemoans the plight of a spiritualistic medium (l. 403 following), harassed by his sitters, required to produce phenomena to order, always open to attacks of fraudulence, and so on. It is a feature of the irony and skill of Sludge's discourse, however, that he is guilty of precisely this - that is to say, fraudulent practice. He proceeds to reveal his various tricks to his exposer (ll. 434-65), describing how he retains impressions and facts from people which he later introduces as 'spirit messages' when these people come to him for a séance (ll. 495-518). He asserts that, even if he is exposed, he is still a credible psychic because the public considers that, however fraudulent, a powerful medium is nevertheless a channel for spiritual manifestations (ll. 555-61). He also cheats his patrons - deservedly so, because they allow him to cheat others (ll. 574-663).

Sludge also maintains that he is endorsing orthodox religion by providing proof of the spirituality of Man, the after-life, and the existence of the human soul:

As for religion - why, I served it, sir!

I'll stick to that! With my 'phenomena'
I laid the atheist sprawling on his back,
Propped up St. Paul, or, at least, Swedenborg!
(ll. 664-67)

The latter line is, again, indicative of Home's humour and witty handling of words.

Finally, Sludge admits that he simply enjoyed lying (l. 694), and that he indulged in trickery for his own intellectual gratification (l. 811).

Sludge explains that he is exploiting the general human belief in the other world (l. 815), which he sees as a more perfect parallel of this life: he speaks rather tritely of those who dwell in that place:

... they're ahead,
That's all - do what we do, but noblier done -
Use plate, whereas we eat our meals off delf
(ll. 830-32).

What Sludge exploits is the human belief that this 'other world' can be contacted, a belief which has descended through the Biblical tradition of necromancy when, through the medium the Witch of Endor, Saul had communicated with the disembodied spirit of Samuel (l. 846). With such Biblical knowledge, Sludge explains how he learned to mask his conjuring tricks as spiritual manifestations, how he is constantly alert to profit from situations, turning occurrences to his own advantage, and interpreting ordinary happenings as transcendent phenomena. Thus Sludge reveals himself to be a cunning opportunist in some effectively inappropriate images:

... I've sharpened up my sight
To spy a providence in the fire's going out,
The kettle's boiling (ll. 961-63).

These lines are inappropriate from the point of view of the symbolism which they use, because Sludge is introducing domestic, commonplace objects (fires, kettles), to describe mysterious metaphysical processes. The inappropriateness of Sludge's imagery is highly effective in a broader sense, however, because from the omniscient poet and reader's point of view, whereas normally the use of the commonplace to define the mystic might have the effect of conveying a sense of the ultimate closeness of the mystical to our everyday lives, in the case of the lying, cheating Sludge the effect is to reduce the quality of his so-called 'transcendent', visionary power to the level of crude, common kitchen-ware. Rather than instilling the everyday with an enrichening sense of ultimacy and mystery, the effect is a reversal of Sludge's intention - that is, it unmasks his spirituality and his ethereal mysteriousness as the base, common and lowly fraud that it is.

Another effective aspect of Sludge's language is his use of alliteration, which, apart from having the effect of emphasising the medium's argument through the forcefulness achieved by means of consecutively alliterated sounds, is introduced into the poem with a variety of resultant effects. Park Honan sees three main uses of the technique of alliteration in the poem. First, where Sludge "uses alliteration rhetorically - and often as an implement of sarcasm and satire" (Honan, p. 257). For example, the medium refers to Horsefall's mount as a "hot, hardmouthed, horrid horse" (l. 1252), to the sitter at séances as "the soft, silent, smirking gentleman" (l. 763), or to Miss Stokes as a young lady who might be pitched "Foolish-face-foremost" (l. 713).

The second use of alliteration which Honan classifies is more in the sense of unconscious self-parody on the medium's part, when "he ridicules himself indirectly with alliterated words while lampooning society" (Honan, p. 257). The following lines provide a good instance of this:

> I've felt at times when, dockered, cosseted
> And coddled by the aforesaid company,
> Bidden enjoy their bullying, - never fear ...
> I've felt a child; only, a fractious child (ll. 387-91).

Finally, and most frequently, Honan sees Sludge's alliteration as an emphasis of "the quick, gay, irresponsible quality of utterance" (Honan, p. 257), a use of the technique which "helps to suggest that frivolity which is one of the keynotes of Mr. Sludge's character" (Honan, p. 258). An example of this is:

> ... thenceforth he may strut and fret his hour,
> Spout, sprawl, or spin his target, no one cares (ll. 654-55).

Sludge enters an important spiritualistic controversy when he raises the issue of whether or not transcendent spiritual entities would stoop to the trivia of table-rapping and other similar phenomena (ll. 1073-1074). Sludge's reply to this issue is that, just as primitive Man saw God as a fearful being manifesting Himself in the power and might of the elements, so civilised Man has inclined to the view of a loving God who cares for all aspects of His creation, however minute and trivial: it is this God who would 'stoop' to the trivia of the contemporary séance-room to reveal the supernatural through stock mediumistic techniques:

> ... never mind the nods and raps and winks,
> 'Tis the pure obvious supernatural
> Steps forward, does its duty (ll. 1165-1167).

Sludge persists in the defence of his fraudulence, asserting that some genuine phenomena did emerge through his tricks (ll. 1311-1319), and declaring that he cheated because he derives some satisfaction in desecrating his soul for a worthy end (ll. 1327-1330). Finally, he excuses himself on the grounds that, in an imperfect world, to be deceitful is the only way to survive:

> I cheat in self-defence,
> And there's my answer to a world of cheats!
> (ll. 1346-1347).

This attitude in fact contributes to our impression of Sludge's despicability, because it implies that he is nothing more than a weak scoundrel, and certainly entirely without the status of a full-blooded, evil villain. As Roma A. King asserts of Sludge, he "lacks the stature to be really evil. We are repelled primarily by his smallness and his crude vulgarity" (26).

Sludge's rodomontade whines away into self-pity, servility and pleading (ll. 1477-1499), the medium revealing his false humility and plain rottenness: to the end he makes a desperate bid to play upon his exposer's vulnerability in, again, raising the subject of the latter's deceased mother (ll. 1497-1498).

The final epilogue, spoken by Sludge when his exposer has gone, is a cowardly speech in which the medium venomously and viciously rails against his exposer behind the latter's back, maligning him and accusing him of having murdered his mother (l. 1506).

The form of the poem is both graphic and ironic. It is graphic because, as a monologue, the reader is presented with a character's self-justification in his own words, which renders the content more immediate, more personal, and more dynamic. In addition, the theme itself is a

dramatic one: Isobel Armstrong describes the "dramatic situation" of the poem as the plight of "a medium on the defensive" (Armstrong, p. 212). Moreover, the dramatic monologue which is Sludge's defence attains a high degree of irony through its linguistic form: the art of Sludge, as has already been implied, is his ability to handle words, to talk himself out of awkward positions and around embarrassing and difficult encounters, to obtain mastery over a situation through his verbal prowess, and to turn circumstances to his own advantage by controlling conversations and manipulating others by means of his linguistic expertise. It is therefore fitting that the poet should present Sludge's most awkward situation - and his most cunning escape from it - in the form of a monologue. The crowning irony of this choice of form lies in the fact that all of Sludge's arguments in self-defence serve not to exonerate him, but to condemn him even more as guilty of fraudulence. Rather than proving his innocence, his arguments indicate his greater cunning in being able to <u>seem</u> to give account for his original dishonesty, while still enabling him to escape despite his ready admission of his own guilt. Finally, it is worth noticing that Sludge's verbal prowess is not, of course, due to any real ability on his own part, he being a fictional projection, but is a mark of the poet's own skill and power. Browning shows himself to be a master of illusion in this poem, seeming to withdraw and exclude himself entirely from the substance of the work - through the monologue form - so that the reader is conscious only of the poem as <u>Sludge's</u> self-defence. In fact, the poet is of course still present, manipulating Sludge and presenting the latter's argument from a position of omniscience. The poem is therefore an example of Browning's own power in the handling of irony: we are most immediately aware of Sludge's attempts to deceive the exposer, the sitter, on the question of his fraudulence. What we are only aware of in retrospect

is the poet's success in 'deceiving', or, at least, in manipulating the reader into believing that what we have read is an immediate and first-hand defence by Sludge, rather than a fictional work, couched in monologue form, being skilfully handled by the omniscient poet who, though being duped by Sludge, is in fact 'duping' the reader by presenting a fiction which absorbs the reader with its own sense of immediacy and reality. The epilogue of the poem, when Sludge as it were invites the reader to join him in mocking his exposer, the poet, behind the latter's back - should perhaps be seen, rather, as the poet's mockery (through Sludge) of the reader who had been 'deluded' by a fiction.

This aspect of the poem leads us to a consideration of another, closely related area of its operation - the element of self-parody. In his self-defence, which introduces the subject of truth, Sludge makes resource to the question of religious belief (ll. 1073-1166), and to the workings of the human imagination, declaring in the case of the latter that his 'lying' is no more than the liberties and licence taken by artists in their use of symbolism, illustration, and illusion (ll. 1436 -42). As far as this assertion is concerned, however, as Edwin Johnson indicated: "Neither the poet, nor the actor ... dishonestly tampers with our perceptions... But Sludge is a tamperer with men's perceptions, and worse with their very souls" (27).

The richness of Sludge's language - and hence, of course, of Browning's poetic power - is conveyed too through the imagery of the poem. Here we find a considerable amount of animal symbolism: Sludge, likening his own acquisition of information to that of the Roman cobbler who silently listens to the conversations around him (ll. 519-43), sees both symbolised in the ant-eater's long tongue which licks out its food:

... like an ant-eater's long tongue,
Soft, innocent, warm, moist, impassible
And when't was crusted o'er with creatures - slick
Their juice enriched his palate (ll. 540-43).

The image recurs later:

... Being lazily alive,
Open-mouthed, like my friend the ant-eater,
Letting all nature's loosely-guarded motes
Settle and, slick, be swallowed! (ll. 1058-1061).

In a similar vein, Sludge resorts to animal imagery when discussing the public's assessment of a medium's powers however fraudulent he may be at the same time:

He may cheat at times;
That's in the 'medium'-nature, thus they're made,
Vain and vindictive, cowards, prone to scratch.
And so all cats are; still, a cat's the beast
You coax the strange electric sparks from out,
By rubbing back its fur; not so a dog... (ll. 556-61).

This dog and cat imagery is introduced again, when Sludge is relating the attitude of his fraudulent patrons towards him:

Snap at all strangers, half-tamed prairie-dog,
So you cower duly at your keeper's beck!
Cat, show what claws were made for, muffling them
Only to me! (ll. 576-79)

It should be noted that all of these animal images are applied by Sludge in relation to himself. The aspects of the animals upon which he concentrates are the subtlty, precision, and relentlessly successful

qualities of the ant-eater in licking out its prey, the cruelty and malignity of the cat, the ferocity of the wild dog. So, too, Sludge is expert and indefatigable in snaring his 'prey', his sitters, and he has the spitefulness and viciousness of a cat or wild dog. The cumulative effect of these images is to imply that Sludge himself is a 'beast', lacking ordinary decency and propriety; we should remember how, in a letter to Isa Blagden, Browning, significantly, referred to Home as "vermin". It should also be noted that, ironically, in the epilogue, the ranting medium maligns his exposer as a "brute-beast" (l. 1500). In fact it is Sludge, and not his exposer, who possesses brutish and bestial qualities of cunning, viciousness and cruelty - and the relentless stalking of his prey.

Another interesting image in the poem is the metaphor of building which relates to the issue of truth in the argument of the work, already discussed. Describing how his success depends upon his ability to lie, Sludge asserts:

> Erect your buttress just as wide o' the line,
> Your side, as they build up the wall on theirs;
> Where both meet, midway in a point, is truth
> High overhead: so, take your room, pile bricks,
> Lie! (ll. 672-76).

This image is ironic too because of the equivocal nature of its effect: while insisting upon building his stance on lies, Sludge is of course suggesting not simply that his 'truth' is a lie, but that his whole concept of Truth is based upon a totally unsure 'foundation'. Moreover, as this image occurs in one of the sections of the poem concerned with religious or Biblical matters, it is interesting to draw parallels from Scripture with Sludge's image of building upon lies - such as Christ's parable of the two men who built houses upon rock

and sand, and Christ's intention of 'building' his church upon Peter, the rock. The imagery of Christ, founder of the Christian religion, indicated the need to build one's life upon truth, faith and love, while the imagery used by Sludge - advocate of the cheat of Spiritualism - implies that life should be built upon lies, mistrust and deceit.

In conclusion, therefore, Mr. Sludge the Medium is more than simply a counterblast to Spiritualism or a personal lampoon directed against D. D. Home. It is possible that such elements are present in the work, but the motivation behind it resulted not in the production of a hysterical tirade against a creed opposed by Browning, but in a witty and complex work constructed in monologue form, rich in ironic imagery and innuendo, which raises important questions about the nature of Truth, and discusses a variety of assumptions about artistic and religious truths.

However satiric Browning's treatment of Spiritualism in his poetry may have been, however, one would expect a different handling of the theme in Elizabeth's work. In fact, it is interesting to note that, despite her intense interest in Spiritualism, there are comparitively few references to the phenomenon in her poems. Nevertheless her poetry shows her predominant interest in the subject, through her consideration of related themes such as death, the immortality of the soul, and the spiritual life. Many of her poems introduce the subject of death thematically, while her imagery is frequently derived from this and other related subjects. The following four chapters of the study are concerned with a discussion of Elizabeth's poetry, the influence of her interest in Spiritualism upon her work, and her handling of these themes in her creative writing.

Notes to Chapter Three

(1) Monckton Milnes (1809-1885), poet, began to hold these breakfast parties in 1837, drawing together celebrities of diverse opinion and pursuits. That year he entered politics as M.P. for Pontefract. He was a close friend of Tennyson, Hallam, Thackeray and Swinburne.

Monckton Milnes is known to have been interested in Mesmerism, while as Jean Burton asserts, his view of Spiritualism was "that it was all of great psychologic interest". (Burton, p. 128).

(2) Nathaniel Hawthorne: The English Notebooks, ed. Randall Stewart (New York 1941), p. 381.

(3) Julian Hawthorne: Nathaniel Hawthorne and his Wife, a biography (London, 1885), I, 30. Later cited as N. Hawthorne and Wife.

(4) Nathaniel Hawthorne: Passages from the French and Italian Notebooks (London, 1871), II, 13-14. Later cited as French and Italian Notebooks.

(5) Julian Hawthorne wrote that, as far as Spiritualism was concerned: "Mr. Hawthorne and Mr. Browning ... had both abominated it from the beginning" (N. Hawthorne and Wife, I, 31).

Madame Home, clearly aiming to undermine Hawthorne's validity as an objective critic of Spiritualism, declared that: "Nathaniel Hawthorne never was present at a séance with Home" (Gift of D. D. Home, p. 97). She asserted, therefore, that "Hawthorne's attitude was naturally that of a sceptic" (Gift of D. D. Home, pp. 100-101).

It is evident, however, that Hawthorne was interested in Swedenborgianism - though probably not a believer. Julian Hawthorne wrote:

> My father became acquainted at different times with several Swedenborgians - in his early days with William Pike, and afterwards with Powers, the sculptor,

and with Dr. J. J. Garth Wilkinson in London; and re remarked in one of his journals that he had always found something remarkable in men of the faith, [Memoirs, ed. Edith G. Hawthorne (New York, 1938), p. 15; later cited as J. Hawthorne Memoirs].

Nevertheless, if interested in Swedenborgianism, then for Nathaniel Hawthorne, Spiritualism was an entirely different matter. He himself wrote: "Meanwhile this matter of spiritualism is surely the strangest that ever was heard of; and yet I feel unaccountably little interest in it, - a sluggish disgust, and repugnance to meddle with it" (N. Hawthorne and Wife, pp. 150-51), a view which his son commended as "a repugnance ... characteristic of a thoroughly healthy and well-balanced mind" (N. Hawthorne and Wife, p. 151).

There is evidence to suggest, however, that the Hawthorne family was not unaffected by spiritualistic phenomena. Julian Hawthorne recorded details of the family's American governess, a medium of automatic writing who abandoned the practice because she concluded that the messages received were not from 'spirits', but from other minds affecting hers by telepathic means (N. Hawthorne and Wife, pp. 30-31). There was another curious tale of Nathaniel Hawthorne having been contacted in séances by a 'spirit' named Mary Rondel, who claimed to have died in Boston the previous century. Nobody in the family knew of her, but after Hawthorne's death, his son inherited some old letters and manuscripts concerning an ancestor, Daniel Hawthorne, who had had an unhappy affair with a woman named Mary Rondel (N. Hawthorne and Wife, pp. 31-33).

It is clear too that the occult had some fascination for

for Hawthorne. In his The House of the Seven Gables (1851), with its mesmeric theme, Hawthorne made a very early reference to the so-called 'spirit-raps' which had first been heard in 1848 in Hydesville, through the Fox sisters (see Chapter One). In his novel, Hawthorne quotes the words of Clifford Pyncheon, who exclaims: "These rapping spirits, that little Phoebe told us of the other day ... what are these but the messengers of the spiritual world, knocking at the door of substance? And it shall be flung wide open!" Everyman edition (1968), pp. 254-255.

Finally, although Mrs. Hawthorne never resorted to the consultation of mediums, it is evident that, after her husband's death, she believed in his spiritual survival, for: "She was always conscious of his presence, and whether objectively or subjectively it skills not to ask; or perhaps we create what we feel" (J. Hawthorne Memoirs, p. 220).

(6) Sophia Eckley published a number of volumes of verse, some volumes of short meditations and sermons, and a book describing her tour of the Middle East.

Katherine H. Porter considers that Sophia Eckley was the medium referred to by Harriet Beecher Stowe as "Mrs. E" (Porter, p. 60). If this was indeed the case, then Sophia Eckley appears as a most treacherous and deceitful woman in view of the outcome of her relationship with Elizabeth.

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896), author of Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852), was a profound believer in the truth of Spiritualism, who described 'Mrs. E' as "a very pious, accomplished, and interesting woman", [C. E. Stowe: The Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe, compiled from her Letters and Journals (London, 1889)p. 350, later cited as Life of H. B. Stowe].

Mrs. Stowe wrote of 'Mrs. E' in a letter to her husband dated January 16, 1860:

> Without doubt she is what the spiritualists would regard as a very powerful medium, but being a very earnest Christian, and afraid of getting led astray, she has kept carefully aloof from all circles and things of that nature (ibid).

Mrs. Stowe described how, when she was sitting with 'Mrs. E' and her sister, they heard a guitar struck. Mrs. E's sister left the room, and:

> Mrs. E said, 'Now, that is strange! I asked last night that if any spirit was present with us after you came today, that it would try to touch that guitar'. A little while after her husband came in, and as we were talking we were all stopped by a peculiar sound, as if somebody had drawn a hand across all the strings at once (Life of H. B.Stowe, pp. 351-2).

To the objective reader, it sounds from this account highly likely that Mrs. E's sister and her husband were responsible for the spiritual music, since one of them was in, the other outside the room each time the 'spirits' touched the guitar.

The impression received here of Harriet Beecher Stowe's naivety is excelled only by the portrayal of Mrs. Eckley's unscrupulous treachery. She must indeed have gained some peculiar form of gratification from succeeding in duping both Mrs. Stowe and Mrs. Browning.

More of Mrs. Stowe's interest in Spiritualism will be related shortly.

(7) Robert Browning and Julia Wedgwood, a broken friendship as revealed in their letters, ed. Richard Curle (London, 1937), pp. 167-168.

(8) New Letters, EBB to Isa Blagden, p. 608

McAleer identifies the following people referred to by Elizabeth: Mrs. Cora Hatch (1840-1923) was an American medium known to Longfellow; Thomas R. Hazard was another American spiritualist known to the Brownings.

(9) Hazel Harrod: 'Correspondence of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Elizabeth Barrett Browning', University of Texas Studies in English XXVII (1948), p. 29. Later cited as 'Harrod'.

More will be said of the significance of Elizabeth's father's death with regard to her spiritualistic beliefs, towards the end of this chapter.

Madame Home described Mrs. Beecher Stowe's probable involvement in an American spiritualistic circle that contained a number of notable literary figures. Referring to the poet Sarah Helen Whitman (1803-1878), the fiancée of Edgar Allan Poe, Madame Home described how Sarah Whitman had attended her first séance with Home in the company of a group of sitters, of whom:

> ...one of their number was certainly the late Mr. Henry Ward Beecher, and that two others were probably his sister Mrs. Beecher Stowe, and Mrs. S. Newbold, a friend of the Beechers, whose literary signature was 'Aunt Sue' (Gift of D. D. Home, p. 57).

By 'Aunt Sue' Madame Home was surely referring to the American authoress 'Cousin Sue', who wrote The Foster Brothers (1868) and Wild Roses (1868). Further details of Sarah Helen Whitman's séances with Home are given in D. D. Home, Life and Mission, pp. 232-233.

Returning to Harriet Beecher Stowe, it seems that she, her husband Professor Stowe, and George Eliot (1819-1880)

engaged in a lively correspondence relating to the subject of Spiritualism. Professor Stowe, who claimed to have had communication with his deceased son Henry (Life of H. B. Stowe, p. 350) doubtless found an enthusiastic exponent of the phenomenon in his wife, who declared: "I have long since come to the conclusion that the marvels of spiritualism are natural, and not supernatural, phenomena, - an uncommon working of natural laws" (Life of H. B. Stowe, p. 412) George Eliot, it would seem, had little time for D. D. Home; Professor Stowe wrote to her on March 26, 1882:

> I fully sympathize with you in your disgust with Hume and the professing mediums generally. Hume spent his boyhood in my father's native town, among my relatives and acquaintances, and he was a disagreeable, nasty boy ... My interest in the subject of spiritualism arises from the fact of my own experience, more than sixty years ago, in my early childhood (Life of H. B. Stowe, pp. 419-20).

Professor Stowe described to George Eliot his experiences as a boy in 1834, when he saw objects floating about and through walls (Life of H. B. Stowe, p. 423). Such early visions seem more indicative of a powerful juvenile imagination, than of genuine psychic perception - though doubtless Professor Stowe believed sincerely that he had indeed objectively observed these paranormal events.

Elsewhere, indeed, it is evident that he and George Eliot had disagreed precisely with regard to the 'objectivity' of such perceptions. George Eliot had written to Mrs. Stowe on June 24, 1872:

> Perhaps I am inclined, under the influence of the facts, physiological and psychological, which have been gathered of late years, to give larger place to the interpretation of vision-seeing as subjective than the professor would approve. It seems difficult to limit ... the possibility of confounding sense by impressions derived from inward conditions with those which are directly dependent on external stimulus. In fact, the division between within and without in this sense seems to become every year a more subtle and bewildering problem (Life of H. B. Stowe, p. 421).

It would seem that Mrs. Stowe's pronouncements to George Eliot concerning the subject of Spiritualism affirmed her belief in the validity of the phenomenon. She wrote to her on February 8, 1872:

> I am of the opinion ... that it is just as absurd to deny the facts of spiritualism now as it was in the Middle Ages to subscribe them to the Devil ...
>
> I am perfectly aware of the frivolity and worthlessness of much of the revealings purporting to come from spirits. In my view, the worth or worthlessness of them has nothing to do with the question of fact (Life of H.B. Stowe, pp. 465-6).

(10) R. Barrett Browning: 'Browning on Spiritualism', Times Literary Supplement, December 5, 1902, 365. Later cited as 'Pen Browning'.

(11) Dorothy Hewlett: Elizabeth Barrett Browning (London, 1952), p. 328.

(12) This question relates to the contradictory aspect of Elizabeth's mind. Despite her intelligence she was misled regarding certain subjects. Two examples of her imperceptiveness and

folly were her treatment of her son (already discussed in this chapter), and her attitude towards the French Emperor, Napoleon III. Here, too, was "another subject about which Robert and she disagreed" (Taplin, p. 256). Elizabeth rather naively considered Napoleon III as the altruistic liberator of the Italian people, whereas it is likely that his intervention in Italian domestic affairs was motivated by his desire to strengthen the position of his own country at the expense of the Austrian Empire.

(13) Orthodox Christian responses to Spiritualism varied from the violently hostile, through the cautiously wary, to the viewpoint of so-called 'Christian spiritualists' such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Robert Dale Owen and Harriet Beecher Stowe.

Typical of the orthodox Christian's wary misgivings concerning the phenomenon, was the position of Richard Whately (1787-1863), who became Archbishop of Dublin in 1831. An independent liberal, he opposed slavery and adopted very much a moderate stance in spiritual matters, being a founder of the so-called 'Broad Church view', favouring neither evangelicalism nor the Oxford Movement. Regarding Spiritualism, he wrote:

> I am greatly perplexed ... about Mr. Home's proceedings ... we should be quite sure that there is no possible risk of evil. Now supposing... that the spirits merely amuse themselves with tossing about nosegays and ringing bells ... we should remember that any evil being ... who designed to lead men ultimately into something evil, would not show himself at once in his true character ...
>
> On the whole, therefore, I think it is the safe course to have nothing to do with any necromantic

practices, [Miscellaneous Remains from the Commonplace Book of Richard Whately, D.D., ed. Miss E. J. Whately, (London, 1864), pp. 301-2].

Miss Whately also observed of the Archbishop:

> As to the modern notion of communications with the invisible world, or what is termed 'spiritualism' ... as an inquirer, he did not venture to reject what seemed to him to have some, though by no means conclusive, evidence in its support: as a religious man he could not but maintain that, if there was any truth in it, it was presumptuous, and, perhaps, within the actual prohibition of Scripture, [Life and Correspondence of Richard Whately, D.D. (London, 1866), II, 63-64].

Mrs. Stowe, on the other hand, was able completely to reconcile her Spiritualism with her Christian beliefs. She urged her medium, Mrs. E(ckley), to "try the spirits whether they were of God -, to keep close to the Bible and prayer, and then accept whatever came" (Life of H. B. Stowe, p. 350)

Similarly, in expressing her most mature belief in survival, she declared:

> If we cannot commune with our friends, we can at least commune with Him to whom they are present, who is intimately with them as with us. He is the true bond of union between the spirit world and our souls; and one blest hour of prayer, when we draw near to Him and feel... that love of his that passeth knowledge, is better than all those incoherent, vain, dreamy glimpses with which longing hearts are cheated (Life of H. B. Stowe, P. 487).

Indeed, as far as Elizabeth was concerned, some critics have seen her Christian beliefs as an indication of the likelihood of her ability to believe in human survival, such as Osbert Burdett, who rather simplistically observes that "her intense belief in personal immortality, unlike Brownings, tended to make her credulous", [Osbert Burdett: The Brownings (London, 1928) p. 275; later cited as 'Burdett'].

(14) Maisie Ward: Robert Browning and his World: The Private Face, 1812-61 (London, 1967), pp. 125-126, 236.

(15) For a discussion of Swedenborgianism, see Chapter One.

It is not easy to determine when Elizabeth first became interested in the theories of Swedenborg. During the early days of her married life in Florence, the father of her friend Sophia Cottrell - Charles Tulk - frequently discussed Swedenborgianism with the Brownings. Towards the end of her visit to England in 1851, it seems that Elizabeth had read more of Swedenborg in books lent to her by Fanny Haworth, to whom she wrote on September 24, 1851: "What am I to say of Swedenborg?" [Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, ed. F. G. Kenyon (London, 1898), II, p. 21].

Again, during the winter of 1851-2, in Paris, Elizabeth was lent some of Swedenborg's treatises by Mrs. Fraser Corkran, wife of the Paris correspondent for The Morning Chronicle (Porter, p. 38). By 1855 Elizabeth was reading Swedenborg with increasing enthusiasm, and teaching Pen the principles of the philosophy, introducing the boy to a Swedenborgian magazine for children, (Porter, p. 43). By October 1857, she was referring to herself as a Swedenborgian (Porter, p. 56).

(16) Crystallomancy is an ancient method of so-called 'divination'. In modern times, however, the practice has usually involved the

use of a crystal ball, as in this case. Katherine H. Porter observes that the original ball was given by an oriental to Lady Blessington, and the ensuing public demand for such objects was met by a London optician who produced them on a considerable scale. So-called 'crystallomancy' consisted of putting questions to the ball which would be answered by the seer or seeress 'gazing' into it. Crystal-gazing as a method of 'fortune-telling' is now most frequently seen when used by gipsy 'clairvoyants' at fair-grounds, and on seaside piers.

(17) It is important to observe the distinctions between different branches of the occult, and to understand that to be a believer in Mesmerism did not mean that one automatically believed in Spiritualism, alchemy, magic or astrology. Certainly some 'occultists' believed in a number of different occult phenomena, among them Bulwer-Lytton (see Chapter One, Note Ten). Again, Laurence Oliphant seems to have believed in both, Mesmerism and Spiritualism, while Rossetti, though he may well have retained his belief in Mesmerism, evidently appears to have modified his views of Spiritualism. Coleridge and Wilkie Collins were both interested in dreams, the mind, the sub-consciousness, the influence of opium upon it, and Mesmerism.

However, many mesmerists rejected Spiritualism - including Dickens, the Rev. Chauncy Hare Townshend, and Harriet Martineau. Dickens was a practising mesmerist, but his hostility towards Spiritualism was consistently expressed (see Burton, p. 142; Gift of D. D. Home, pp. 31-32; What I Remember, II, p. 125; Porter quotes a number of Dickens' anti-spiritualist articles, pp. 16-22, including 'The Ghost of the Cock-Lane Ghost', Household Words, Nov. 20, 1850, 'This Spirit Business', H.W., May 1850.

'Latest Intelligence from Spirits', H.W. June 30, 1855 'Well Authenticated Rappings', H.W. 1855; 'Fallacies of Faith', All the Year Round, III, p. 542, Sept. 1860, Anon: 'Modern Magic', AYR, July 28, 1860, 'Rather a strong dose', review of Howitt's History of the Supernatural, and the Review of Home's Incidents in My Life. Porter also cites Dickens' publication of W. J. Wills 'At Home with the Spirits', AYR, Feb. 1866; and Sir Henry Dickens: Recollections, Lond. 1934, p. 63).

Harriet Martineau expressed her disbelief in and hostility towards Spiritualism in The National Anti-Slavery Standard, New York, May 29, 1860; in Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development (London, 1851), p. 217; and in her Autobiography, (Boston, 1877)I, 516, and II, 531.

The Rev. Chauncy Hare Townshend dismissed spiritualistic phenomena, especially table-tilting, in Mesmerism Proved True, (London, 1864), pp. 193-208.

(18) A more detailed discussion and analysis of Browning's influence in undermining Elizabeth's enthusiasm for Mesmerism, appears in my A Study of Mesmerism and the Literature of the Nineteenth Century, with particular reference to Harriet Martineau (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Birmingham 1975), pp. 60-63, 168, 195-196.

The evidence in favour of Elizabeth's declined belief in Mesmerism is sufficient to bring into question such assertions as W. C. De Vane's: "Mesmerism was in its hey-day in 1844-5, and Elizabeth Barrett was, and continued to be, a believer" A Browning Handbook (London, 1937), p. 201. Later cited as 'De Vane'.

(19) For example, W. Hall Griffin declared: "The age was materialistic, and she, with her intense spirituality, longed for witness to the reality of the unseen ... that others might be won from their

materialism", [The Life of Robert Browning (London, 1938), p. 205].

Similarly, J.M. Cohen asserts of Spiritualism that many saw it as "a vital proof of the unseen world offered to a materialistic age", [Robert Browning (London, 1952), p. 100].

(20) It should be noted, however, that Elizabeth was not incapable of expressing reservations regarding Home's trustworthiness. Noting Elizabeth's increasing misgivings concerning Home, William Irvine and Park Honan cite these (Irvine and Honan, pp. 345, 356) as examples of "a reassuring hostility" on her part towards the medium (Irvine and Honan, p. 356).

In a letter to James Jackson Jarves dated February 28, 1856, Elizabeth expressed her belief in Home's powers however dubious he may have been in moral terms. She wrote of sceptics and those who rejected the phenomena:

> They think that what impugns the authority of a man, disproves his agency - which is very unphilosophical ... I am very sorry that Hume should have failed as a man to such an extent. That he was commonplace, weak and affected, was from the beginning sufficiently obvious to me ... Being made the centre of a coterie and the object of so much general attention, must be trying to feeble natures like his - I am very sorry, for the sake of the subject ... which may be somewhat thrown back in public appreciation here and there, in consequence (Browning Collection, Yale University).

In another letter to Jarves, dated January 31st, she requested information from him relating to "an account which has reached me concerning the failure of the moral character of Hume the medium" (Yale Collection).

In a third letter to Jarves, dated April 20 and written

from Rome, she referred to Home's expulsion from Paris but again gave him the benefit of the doubt as to the fraudulence of the sum total of his mediumistic powers:

> Is it true, do you fancy, that he fell into suspicion and disgrace at the Tuilleries? The story is told in Paris, and also that one of his shoes (full of machinery) was found, after he had been kicked out. I don't ask you if that's true because it can't be (Yale Collection).

In a letter to Mrs. Kinney, written from Paris on December 19, 1855, Elizabeth expressed the hope that Home might recover from an illness, to "live down all suspicions, and give my husband, among others, the opportunity of confessing the wrong of his" (Yale Collection).

Finally, she wrote to Mrs. Kinney from Paris on February 29, 1855:

> Hume is morally worthless, and a true medium. The fact of his being morally worthless, no more impugns the fact of his being a true medium, than it does the colour of his eyes and the size of his feet. If I caught my dentist shoplifting, I wouldn't on that account, suspect his power over my molars (Yale Collection).

(21) It is interesting to note that Sir Osbert Sitwell's objections to Spiritualism were, like Browning's, based on moral, theological, and intellectual tenets. In his view, Spiritualism: "trades on grief", "impudently assumes the dignity of a religion", and exploits "public credulity", [Life Hand Right Hand! (London, 1946), p. 256].

(22) Spiritual Magazine, July 1, 1864, p. 316.

However, as far as this assertion is concerned, William

Lyon Phelps rightly refutes it on the grounds that "the one thing that pleased Browning most was to hear his wife's poetry ranked higher than his own", [William Lyon Phelps: 'Robert Browning on Spiritualism', The Yale Review, New Series XXII (1933), p. 128].

Similarly, as G. K. Chesterton wrote in disputing the validity of Home's claim: "The idea of ... Robert Browning running about the room after a wreath in the hope of putting his head into it, is one of the genuine gleams of humour in this rather foolish affair", [Robert Browning (London, 1903), p. 95].

Chesterton maintained that Browning's dislike of Home and spiritualists was akin to his antipathy towards George Sand and her bohemian circle. In Chesterton's view Browning was in many respects a totally conventional figure who detested eccentricity and had an "uncompromising dislike of what is called Bohemianism, of eccentric or slovenly cliques, of those straggling camp followers of the arts who exhibit dubious manners and dubious morals" (Robert Browning, p. 93).

Chesterton's own view of Spiritualism was that its supernatural truth was indisputable, but that it was a dangerous practice nonetheless, ['Spiritualism', All Things Considered (London 1908) p. 156].

As a Catholic, Chesterton was voicing the orthodox view of his Church that: "The Catholic Church has always condemned any attempt to hold intercourse ... with the spirits of the dead" (Crehan, p. 16).

(23) 'A Lovers' Quarrel', 'Men and Women', R. Browning: Poetical Works 1833-64, ed. Ian Jack (London, 1970), ll. 43-9.

The following references to 'Mr. Sludge the Medium' are quoted from this edition.

(24) For example: Isobel Armstrong: 'Browning's "Mr. Sludge the Medium",' Robert Browning, ed. Philip Drew (London, 1966), p. 212; Philip Drew: The Poetry of Browning - a critical introduction (London, 1970), p. 290: Park Honan: Browning's Characters, a Study in poetic technique (New Haven, Yale, 1961), p. 178; William O. Raymond: The Infinite Moment and other essays in Robert Browning (University of Toronto, 1965), pp. 109, 135, 141.

These works are later cited by the author's surname.

(25) Betty S. Flowers likens Browning's style at this point to the "conversational immediacy" which she sees used by Donne in his similarly explosive opening to The Canonization; Browning and the Modern Tradition (London, 1976), p. 78.

(26) Roma A. King: The Focusing Artifice, the Poetry of Robert Browning (Ohio University, 1968), p. 123.

(27) Edwin Johnson: 'On "Mr. Sludge the Medium"', The Browning Society's Papers, II, Part i (1885-90, London), p. 27.

Chapter Four: An Analysis of Relevant Themes in 'The Battle of Marathon' (1820), 'An Essay on Mind, with other poems' (1826), 'Poems' (1833) and 'The Seraphim and other poems' (1838).

In the previous two chapters an attempt has been made to describe and account for the deep interest which Spiritualism held for Elizabeth Barrett Browning. When one turns to her creative work, however, it is surprising to discover that the phenomenon features very rarely in her work in an explicit sense. There is nothing as important, nor as specific, for example, as Mr. Sludge the Medium. Indeed, as Alethea Hayter declares of Elizabeth's Spiritualism:

> Yet this subject which was so much the most interesting of all to her, never permeated her poetry. There are no clematis wreaths, no great white hands, no spirit voices, no shivering tables in her poems, not even in her wide-ranging imagery (1).

However, although there are few - if any - references in her poems to séance-phenomena, mediums and the like, it is precisely in the sense of 'permeation' that one could argue that Elizabeth's Spiritualism influenced her work. In Chapter Seven, with reference to Aurora Leigh (the work which contains Elizabeth's most explicit reference to Spiritualism), it will be seen how extremely cautious the poet was in mentioning the phenomenon explicitly in her poems. Her experience of Browning's attitude towards the subject made her very sensitively aware of how others considered Spiritualism, and it was no doubt for this reason that she introduced the phenomenon so rarely into her work - fear of alienating her public but, more than this, fear of alienating them from a consideration of the many other important things which she had to say - whereas she made no attempt to conceal her active interest in the matter from family, friends and enquirers.

Nevertheless it is evident that the contemplation of Spiritualism, its basis, its 'revelations', its implications, did influence her work. She has a great deal to say in her poetry of death, the mutability of this human existence, the question of immortality, the nature and condition of the human 'soul' and 'spirit', the notion of what a spiritual after-life could be like, and the role of God in a cosmic scheme involving human immortality. In addition, it is clear that Death is frequently the subject of her poetry, taken either as a stock thematic element in the narrative of many of her poems, or as the motivation behind poetry which she wrote in contemplation of the deaths of others - friends, artists and national patriots alike. Moreover, the subject of Death is the origin of a great deal of Elizabeth's imagery, which is frequently drawn from the subject of funerals, the graveyard and the death-chamber. In this respect it is tempting to view her work as the product of a creative mind both morbid and sentimental; however, it has always to be remembered that in her work all occurs within the context of a universe created and governed by the Christian God, a presence which instils the darkest situation, the most sombre imagery, with life, hope and love.

In this and the following three chapters, an attempt will be made to discuss and analyse Elizabeth's handling of her interest in Spiritualism and subjects related to it, in her poetry. The intention behind this section of the study is not to detect Spiritualism or to argue for its presence in the poems where clearly it cannot be said to be present in an explicit sense, but rather to examine her poetry within the context of her interest in the phenomenon, to consider how far - if at all - and in what measure this interest can be said to have influenced her work, and to determine the effect which her interest had upon her spiritual thinking as revealed in her poetry.

Elizabeth's first published poem, The Battle of Marathon (1820), appeared when she was fourteen years of age. It was therefore written many years before she became interested in Spiritualism. As Katherine H. Porter says of Elizabeth's juvenilia: "Elizabeth Barrett's life as revealed in her early poems and letters shows little or none of the spiritual restlessness which characterized her later" (Porter, p. 30). As far as early volumes such as The Battle of Marathon are concerned, it is clear that there is little of the profound striving with the problems of death and immortality that one would expect to find in the work of a poet of more mature years. The poem is remarkable, however, for the degree of its scholarship and the stylistic handling of the theme: the high epic-form of the work is ideally appropriate to the classical theme of warfare. Here, Elizabeth's theme describes how the forces of King Darius of Persia were halted in their invasion of Greece by the Athenian army led by Miltiades, and how, in the subsequent Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C., the Greeks defeated the Persian army in a decisive victory that contributed greatly to the rise of Athens and the Greek civilisation.

The significant feature of the poem from the point of view of present purposes is not that the poet's handling of the theme of Death is simplistic and superficial here, but that it should be present at all in such early work. The violent subject of the poem does of course indicate that Death will feature in its narrative, but it is an indication of the poet's early skill that she is able to assume the classical mood of the work, and, throughout, Death is appropriately regarded as a glorious proof of courage and bravery. Indeed, such an attitude is re-echoed in some of the later volumes where the pain and anguish of death is sometimes considered 'redemptive' only in so far as it is accompanied by acts of integrity or noble bequests - the

creeds of political freedom, or moral justice, that dying heroes leave behind them.

The standard attitude adopted towards the subject of death in this poem is to consider it as a sole alternative to inglorious life, or as an indication of the valour of the dying warrior. This is reflected in the speech of the Greek hero Aristides, who declares the Persian herald "Unfit to live, yet more unfit to die" (l. 209), and who, in slaying the herald, beseeches Jove to "life or death decree" for his victim (l. 235). To attain victory or to die is the uncompromising intention of the courageous Greeks, as the poet describes: "Each Greek resolved to triumph or to die" (l. 299). Similarly, the Greek hero Hector fights "For victory or death, nor e'en in death to yield" (l. 897). This 'valorous' attitude is required of his forces by the brave Miltiades, who exhorts his men "For freedom triumph or for freedom die" (l. 1160). In describing the bravery of the combatants, the poet declares how "by heroes, heroes die" (l. 1167), while for the dying Zeno, "the Grecian hero" (l. 1324), he "nor fears approaching death" (l. 1320). Similarly Cynoegirus fires the frame of Pallas "With scorn of death, and hope of future fame" (l. 1444).

The poem reveals little serious consideration of death and a spiritual survival of it. Death is regarded simply as the will of Jove, and therefore an inevitability. The gruesome death of the Persian Herald (ll. 263-7) is accompanied by a note of resignation: "Jove wills his fall, and who can strive with Jove?" (l. 256). This deterministic attitude is expressed too in Jove's words to Aphrodite:

> Daughter, not mine the secrets to relate,
> The mysteries of all-revolving fate.
> But ease thy breast; enough for thee to know,
> What powerful fate decrees, will Jove bestow!
>
> (ll. 357-60).

The Greek leader, Miltiades, echoes this fatalistic notion of Jove's omnipotence when he speaks of the inescapability of heaven-sent death:

> I fear not for myself the silent tomb,
> Death lies in every shape, and death must come
> (ll. 529-30).

Similarly, it is purely by a stroke of 'fate' that the death of the Greek tyrant and traitor, Hippias, is delayed by his ability to continue fighting at the point of death (l. 1219).

Against this simplistically resigned response to the inevitability of death decreed by 'Fate', the poem contains little exploration of the nature of the 'spiritual life' which awaits mortal humanity beyond the grave. There are a number of references to ghosts and disembodied 'spirits' which indicate that they have retained their earthly individuality. Following the Persian assault on Greece, many "dreary ghosts" have fled to Pluto (l. 3), while it is "Priam's reeking shade" (l. 20) that calls for vengeance upon the invader. Again, as Aristides kills the Persian herald it is with the belief that the dying enemy will return to some nether spiritual sphere where he will retain some aspect of his original personality:

> Die! thy base shade to gloomy regions ;fled,
> Join there the shivering phantoms of the dead
> (ll. 214-15).

Referring again to this herald, it is asserted that "his pale ghost" will fly to Pluto's empire (l. 244). In a similar vein, the poet refers to the spirits of the dead as "shivering shade" (l. 379), "shivering ghost" (l. 1190), "the tyrant's ghost" entering hell (l. 1218), and "groaning spirits" (l. 1328).

Apart from these references, the poet describes the after-life of the hero Pallas in the following terms:

> The Elysium plains his generous spirit trod,
> 'He lived a Hero and he died a God'
> (11. 455-56).

These references, and the above lines, are of course disappointing if one is seeking a deeper revelation of the poet's thinking concerning the after-life. The above lines in particular are conservative, though predictably so in their expression of the orthodox classical concept of the spiritual life - an existence crowned with glory and honour - that awaits the courageous warrior-hero. In effect it is evident that a deeper attempt to penetrate the problem of death would be wholly inappropriate in this poem, where the youthful poet is concerned rather to convey the sense of a classical event involving deeds of bravery and valour in battle, than to investigate the Christian problem of suffering and death, a metaphysical exploration originating in the poet's modern Christian consciousness which would have conflicted with the Hellenic setting and theme. It is nevertheless interesting to note that, as has already been indicated, all of these references suggest an assumption on the part of the poet that an individual who has undergone physical death not only survives in some 'spiritual' existence, but retains a measure of the personality or individuality that the deceased possessed on this earth - that is, that the dying are not absorbed into some vast world-soul, or into the being of one supreme deity; nor do they survive in some negative, lifeless form of existence similar to the ancient Jewish concept of sheol, where the souls of the dead are supposedly accumulated in a sombre stasis. Here, the dying retain a vestige of that integral personality that characterised them as individuals in this life.

Other references to related subjects in the poem include the

notion of Athens' might being lost to "the grave" (l. 129) - an idea which because of considerable importance in Elizabeth's exploration of the theme of wasted Italian strength and ability in her later Italian volumes - and the dying Pallas' brow being moistened by "the dews of death" (l. 1454).

To conclude, therefore, The Battle of Marathon is an early work impressive for the maturity of the poet's style and expression, and for the degree of scholarship which it contains. It is a poem characterised by vigour and vitality in which death is treated simplistically, in keeping with the antiquity of the setting and theme. Even here, however, we find in the youthful poet an interest in death and in the concept of its survival by the human individual - an interest which later became increasingly important in her work.

Elizabeth's second volume, An Essay on Mind, with other poems (1826), certainly marked a development in the poet's handling of the themes of death, immortality and the spiritual life, in so far as it is not restricted to a simplistic concept of classical heroes dying gloriously in battle and being exalted to the Elysian fields.

An Essay on Mind is the principal poem in the volume; Gardner B. Taplin sees the exalted aim of this work as being "to survey from classical Greece to the present the fields of history, science, metaphysics and poetry" (Taplin, p. 14). This ambitious poem is in fact an analysis of the effects which the human mind has had in different branches of learning, rather than a discussion of the actual intellectual processes which have resulted in these effects. Elizabeth's classification of these 'effects' which the mind has had divided them into two main sections - the philosophical, and the poetical. The discussion relating to the philosophical effects of mental activity she further subdivided

into an analysis of History (the doctrine of Man), Physics (the doctrine of sufficient causes), and Metaphysics (the doctrine of abstracts, or final causes). The discussion relating to the poetical effects of the mind concentrated primarily upon the didactic purposes of literature, and their fulfilment.

Of prime importance is the emergence from the poem's discussion of the spiritual quality of the mind. Here we find that the mortality of the body is constantly at variance with the spirituality of the mind. This is a theme which recurs throughout Elizabeth's work. The body is regarded as a trap or snare imprisoning the mind, but it is the mind which, at death, forms the spiritual essence of the individual that attains immortality. The antipathy between the transcendence of the spiritual mind and the restrictions of the physical body is expressed in lines such as the following:

> Ev'n here, while Mind, in Mind's horizon springs,
> Her 'native mind' is weighing on her wings
> (ll. 623-24)

and:

> ... less we find
> That, aiding clay, we crouch too low for Mind
> (ll. 677-78).

However, the poem asserts that, though imprisoned within it, the mind is not inextricably dependent upon the body: "Destroy the body! - will the spirit stay?" (l. 649). It is evident here that the poet is considering 'mind' and 'spirit' synonymously - that is, she clearly understands that it is the intellectual capacity or mental awareness which is the expression of the inner, immortal 'spirit' of an individual, and therefore a form of that spirit.

The poem describes the transcience of life and the inevitability of its progression towards death, decay and destruction. Man,

paradoxically - "the lord of empires" - is also, for the poet: "the food of worms" (l. 379). Similarly, all the vanities of this existence pass away with it: "life, and riches, turn to death, and dust" (l. 479). Life is "a scale" (l. 551) which one inevitably ascends in progressing towards death itself. Life is:

> A scale of knowledge...
> With each progressive link, our steps ascend,
> And traverse all, before they reach the end (ll. 552-54).

However, the philosophy expressed in the poem is not without hope. The dead are regarded as the instructors of the present and future generations. Those who have lived and died leave their 'works' behind them, and the living may learn from these. Again, this notion became increasingly important in the developing poetic consciousness of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. She clearly believed in history as an organic process of development in which each succeeding generation learns from the mistakes, discoveries and triumphs of its predecessors. The concept is not important solely to her view of humanity as a vast inter-related whole, however, but also to her notion of the 'immortality' of individuals. Because the dead leave behind them a testimony of advice, example, or warning, because their successors are conscious of this testimony then the dead may truly be said to have attained a measure of 'immortality' being always (in their deeds) in the consciousness of those who follow them. In this sense "the mortal's grave" is given an "immortal halo" (l. 4). Time, for Elizabeth,

> ... lifts old History's faded tapestry,
> I' the dwelling of past years - she, aye, is seen
> Point to the shades, where bright'ning tints had been -
> The shapeless forms outworn, and mildew'd o'er -
> And bids us rev'rence what was lov'd before;
> Gives the dark wreath and dusty urn to fame,
> And lend its ashes - all she can - a name (ll. 209-15).

In this passage the effectiveness of the argument is derived to a large degree from the appropriateness of the evocative images - mildew, wreath, urn and ashes. The poet is describing how Time and the lessons which it bestows can 'resurrect' old, dead history, causing it to live anew to succeeding generations in terms of the testimony of example and counsel. The ironic element of the poet's argument is brought home, again, through these images. For just as the past is 'dead', so, too, the present generation will pass away. Time is never static, and the "wreaths", "urns", and "ashes" of past ages and epochs will become the literal funeral trappings which will bear witness to the passing of the present generation too. This type of imagery is found throughout Elizabeth's work, and although undeniably sombre, its morbidity must be viewed within the context of the poet's argument as a whole: for just as this generation will, die, so it too, will become the 'living example' to those who succeed it. Time, history, the human race - these are aspects of the one cosmic order, a system which comprises both death and life, birth, both loss and gain, passing from immediate existence, and immortality in the eternal testimony of the past.

In this function of Time, Man is urged to consider the immortal testimony of the dead (ll. 216-23), to "let the tomb its silent lesson give (l. 224), to appreciate "the immortality of mortal pow'r" (l. 231). To associate the heritage of the past with the present is a "Majestic task" (l. 254), upon which "depend the dead, and hang the living too" (l. 259). False historians, who "pass the cold grave ... and use the truth to illustrate a lie" are severely condemned (ll. 266-67). It is, indeed, the function of the living to interpret the lessons of the dead:

> Spirit of life! for aye, with heav'nly breath,
> Warm the dull clay, and cold abodes of death!

Clasp in its urn the consecrated dust,
And bind a laurel round the broken bust;
While mid decaying tombs, thy pensive choice,
Thou bidst the silent utter forth a voice,
To prompt the actors of our busy scene,
And tell what is, the tale of what has been!
(ll. 358-65).

It is in this sense, therefore, that the past is of relevance to the present and, again, the ambiguous significance of the images underlines not only this fact (the sense in which the abstract past is of value to the present), but also the reality of human mortality. Yet the poet insists that some may attain immortality: "The deathless fame exists for buried man" (l. 457). Examples of those who have become 'immortal' through the value of their testimony to all ages and epochs, are Archimedes (ll. 397-439), Newton, who was "too high in soul, to glory in his clay" (l. 598), Locke, whose "sepulchral urn" is "where students rapturous vigil keep" (ll. 877-8), and the poet Tyrtaeus (ll. 1182-1205). All of these figures, although long since dead in the literal, physical sense, are seen by the poet to have contributed some permanent offering to the sum total of human progress and advancement. This is a 'living' monument to their eternal memory. The problem of whether the dead are 'alive' in some spiritual existence in an active, conscious sense, will be discussed shortly.

In so far as it is an intellectual contribution which has ensured the 'immortality' of those whom the poet has cited, it is evident that it is the Mind which contains the quintessential spiritual aspect of the individual:

So when the property of Mind we call
An essence, or a substance spiritual,
We name her thus, by marking how she clings

Less to the forms than essences of things;

... reflective Mind,

Essence unseen in objects seen may find (ll. 771-79).

The intellectual quality of the human individual would appear to manifest itself in a more spiritual manner, therefore, through the intuitive faculty which gives it the insight to penetrate mere external form through to the quintessential aspect of an object. The poet's technique here of personifying the Mind, and referring to it by the female pronoun, has the effect of clarifying the poet's dialectic. In such an abstract discussion of intellectual qualities as An Essay on Mind it would be easy for confusion to arise from the terminology employed by the poet. This danger, however, is offset by the use of personification when referring to the mind.

The spiritual quality of the mind relates it to the ruler of the spirit, who is God (l. 60), while it is the spirit of an artist which, in the contemplation of Nature, produces that essence of Beauty which is Poetry itself (l. 1042). It is this type of assertion that indicates the Romanticism of much of Elizabeth's thinking. Her tendency to regard the artistic faculty as of an essentially spiritual nature which, through contemplation of the natural world, aspires to the absolute of Beauty embodied in created Art - these ideas bear similarities to Wordsworth's thinking concerning the creative act. Other Romantic elements of Elizabeth's work will be discussed shortly.

When referring to the immortality attained by those great men and women who have left their intellectual and artistic contributions to civilisation behind them, the question was raised as to whether or not these figures could be said to have passed on to an active, conscious, spiritual existence beyond the grave. It is evident that the poet does indeed indicate the reality of such an existence:

Earth yields her treasures up - celestial air
Receives thy globe of life - when, journeying there,
It bounds from dust, and bends its course on high,
And walks, in beauty, through the wondering sky
(ll. 389-92)

The sense of the reality of this spiritual existence is conveyed through the physicality of some of the words chosen here, such as 'yields', 'journeying', 'bounds' and 'walks'. These words emphasise that to have attained the spiritual life beyond death is as literal an activity as journeying or walking is in this life. Moreover, the poet retains, despite this, a sense of the ethereal quality of this after-life, by the use of the phrase "celestial air", a vague unearthly term which asserts the transcendence of the spiritual life which, though as real as this life, nevertheless contrasts with the physical nature of the latter even though it is in 'earthly' terms that the poet chooses to describe the after-life. These are powerful lines, the strength of which lies in the poet's stylistic choice of words in other respects too: the notion of the "globe of life" both stresses the compactness of the immortal spiritual 'essence' or soul, emphasising its 'sanctity', while the term "globe" serves further to imply that it is the earthly life in this world from which the spirit soars to its immortal refuge. Although the concept of heaven expressed in these lines is somewhat simplistic (that is, the disembodied spirit is walking through the sky), the poet makes the important statement that the spiritual life is one of beauty (l. 392), and that it is a meditative, contemplative, peaceful condition - as conveyed by the phrase "wondering sky". It is possible too that there is a sense here of the sky "wondering" at the disembodied spirit, a notion which serves to objectify the astonishing beauty or magnificence of the spiritual life, and to underline the marvel which is human

survival of physical death.

The poem has more to say concerning the after-life and the spirits who dwell therein:

> Some kindred home for Mind - some holy place,
> Where spirits look on spirits, 'face to face' -
> Where souls may see, as they themselves are seen,
> And voiceless intercourse may pass between,
> All pure - all free!
> (ll. 661-65).

These lines are an early expression of Elizabeth's belief in survival, pre-dating her interest in Spiritualism and Swedenborgianism. Again, the reality of the after-life is conveyed by the use of physical, earthly terms such as "look" and "see", while the strange ethereal quality of that life is stressed, nonetheless, by the powerful, evocative phrase "voiceless intercourse" (l. 660). The concept of the 'spirit-world' presented is of course a realm combining a communal atmosphere with the important assertion that the soul has retained its individual personality (again, as opposed to being absorbed into some form of 'world-soul'). The disembodied spirit enjoys a state of heightened perception and insight in which individual spirit recognizes other spirits and is capable of communicating with them. The after-life, finally, is a state of freedom (l. 665), which asserts its transcendence, and of purity (ibid), which implies that it is a condition untinged by sinfulness and misery, factors which ruin this earthly life, the 'spirits' presumably having been purged, through death, of their flaws and failings.

The poem ends by asking if all human learning terminates in death (ll. 1212-1215). The answer offered is in the negative: as "the spirit glides away" leaving to the world "its memory with its clay"

(ll. 1253-1254), we learn that the mind, having spent its earthly life in learning and study, proceeds to a celestial realm where "Learning ends in Truth" (l. 1248), leaving behind its learning that the world may acknowledge, venerate and utilise, while itself proceeding towards the transcendent state of ultimate Truth, which was the goal towards which all the mind's intellectual effort while on earth, had been aspiring.

An Essay on Mind, therefore, is a significant and ambitious work concerned with the effects (in terms of human progress) of intellectual striving. The poem contains some powerful lines, and it raises a number of important issues concerning intellectual activity, the spiritual quality of the mind, the survival of one's name through one's work, and of the identity through the immortal spiritual life beyond the grave. This life is sensitively described by the young poet, who conceives it in conventional terms, though she describes it imaginatively.

One poem in this second volume interesting for its ironic significance is Verses to My Brother, written in affectionate regard for Elizabeth's favourite brother Edward Barrett Moulton Barrett ('Bro'). Ironically, this poem is headed by a quotation from Milton's Lycidas, the latter being written in memory of Milton's friend who was drowned in the Irish Sea in 1637. Although this poem was not published until 1826, Gardner B. Taplin asserts that it was "probably written several years before" (Taplin, l. 15); 'Bro' himself was drowned fourteen years later, in 1840 - like Milton's dedicatee - and it may well have been the loss of 'Bro' that motivated Elizabeth's interest in Spiritualism (see Chapter Three). The poem deepens our understanding of the effect which Bro's death must have had upon Elizabeth, for it is expressive of a profound and tender love (ll. 8-10), describing how Bro and Elizabeth were childhood playmates (ll. 11-15), fellow-scholars (ll. 16-20),

and enjoyed a relationship based on intense mutual affection (ll. 25-30).

Several of the other poems in the Essay on Mind volume reflect themes and ideas raised by the title-poem. A group of poems relate to the notion of the deceased hero, the noble 'martyr' - figure dying for a cause and attaining 'Immortality' through that cause. This is a theme which runs throughout Elizabeth's poetry, and links The Battle of Marathon with its praise for the valorous warrior-hero, to the much later Italian volumes, expressing admiration for the leaders of the Italian cause for independence. In the Essay on Mind volume, the theme is explored in Stanzas on the Death of Lord Byron. Here, Byron's "spirit wings away" (l. 25) to its "Native shore" (l. 32), leaving behind the immortal testimony of he who stood for liberty and freedom:

> But Memory strives with Death, and lingering near,
> Shall consecrate the dust of Harold's lonely bier!
> (ll. 35-36).

The quasi-religious style of the poem here, with its reference to consecration, is appropriate in view of the 'worship' and veneration afforded to the hero, while the funeral images - 'dust' and 'bier' assert both the literal, physical nature of the hero's death, and the spiritual quality of his testimony which he has left behind him in terms of his example and his stated beliefs.

Related to this poem is Stanzas occasioned by a Passage in Mr. Emerson's Journal, again written in memory of Byron, but in a less-hopeful vein. Here, we read:

> The lips that breathed the deathless thoughts
> - They went asleep in death (ll. 31-32).

This time it is less the immortality of the hero's example which is the poet's concern, than the sorrowful reality of his loss from the earth. Although Byron's thoughts are "deathless" and his heroic followers "played their part" (l. 38), the poet is oppressed by a

profound sense of almost personal loss which cannot be redeemed even by the dead hero's life and example.

Similarly there is a pair of poems concerned with dead patriots. One relates to the Spaniard Riego (2). On a Picture of Riego's Widow describes the plight of the widow of a popular hero, who may only show her public and not her private grief (stanzas i - v). She will die (stanza ix), her grief with her, but nothing can make "his glory seem more dim" (l. 10), or detract from his courageous example (stanza vi). It is in this manner that the dead hero will achieve immortality, and she, as his widow, who made brave attempts to secure his release, will at least share in this 'immortal' (stanza x). Riga's Last Song concerns the Greek Rhiga (3), who exultantly declares his patriotism as he dies (stanzas i - iii). Simplistically, his physical death signifies the release of his immortal spirit (l. 10), while behind him too his earthly immortality is secured through his bravery and his example:

I go to death - but I leave behind
The stirrings of Freedom's mighty mind (ll. 13-14).

Most of the remaining poems in this volume are concerned with the subject of death. Memory conveys a picture of the poet at the end of her life, recalling the past (ll. 30-3). Yet again, however, the poem expresses the need for the dead to be remembered by the living. The poet hopes that her loved ones will keep her 'memory' alive too:

Then, if a thought should glad thy breast
Of those who loved thee first and best,
My name, perchance, may haunt the spot,
Not quite unprized - nor all forgot (ll. 40-43).

The choice of the word "haunt" is significant here in view of the fact that the poet is speaking of a period following her own physical death. Although the sense of this line implies that it is

the poet's 'name' which will survive, and not her identity in 'spirit-form', it is a curious word to choose, suggesting that her 'name' can, of its own volition "haunt" the area where she once lived, in the sense that one might speak of a ghost wilfully desiring to haunt its earthly habitation, after death. From these lines, however, it would seem that the poet is not suggesting such a ghostly or spiritual existence for herself, because the poem as a whole implies uncertainty on the poet's part regarding personal survival, asserting that, if no firm hope can be placed in such a notion, then it is at least important that one should be remembered, and hence in a degree 'immortalised'. However, the usage of the term "haunt" is a skilful one because it raises in the reader's mind an intimation of possible spiritual survival, while in fact stating no more than that the poet's lover may, perhaps, recall to mind her name when she is dead.

Similarly The Prayer expresses the need to be remembered on dying:

> ... I thought of death;
> And prayed that when my lips gave out the breath,
> The friends I loved like life might stay behind (ll. 4-6).

The second stanza of the poem describes the poet's wish to predecease her loved ones, expressly that she might be spared the pain of losing them. This notion expresses Elizabeth's deep distress with regard to the deaths of all those whom she knew and loved - a distress, again, motivated by an inability to cope with the emotional implications of losing the beloved. This attitude, too, may have been essential to the basis of Elizabeth's interest in Spiritualism and the possible survival of physical death by the spirit. In The Prayer, however, it may be that the poet's desire to die before her loved ones is motivated not by her fear of being present to their loss, but by a desire to

be remembered by those who survive her, any possibility of human spiritual survival being too uncertain to offer much comfort to the poet as she meditates upon her own passing. The third stanza, with its ecstatic celebration of life and the joys of the natural world is a skilful stylistic development on the poet's part, for it off-sets the preceding negativity of much of the poem's dialectic, redeeming it from self-indulgence and excessive morbidity.

The Past is again reflective of the mood of spiritual uncertainty explored in these poems. The past is deathly, since it has indeed 'died' (l. 16), but at least it offers a sense of security in a world of constant flux and mutability:

> Her form, though awful, is fair to view;
> The clasp of her hand, though cold, is true;
> Her shadowy brow hath no changefulness (ll. 17-19).

The personified image of Death here is a characteristic device of Elizabeth's enabling her to explore the abstraction of Death more readily. It also relates her poem to a vast body of Christian literature, including Everyman and the morality plays, Chaucer and Bunyan, in which the device is similarly used. For Elizabeth's theme here is universal: the problem of this imperfect life seen against the background of a wholly uncertain future in spiritual terms. The poet speaks of the direful "clay" of the heroic dead (l. 26), but implies that this is more secure than the uncertainty of the future.

The Dream is a contrastingly optimistic poem, indicating that Christ can offer succour and hope to the soul tormented by thoughts of death and total extinction. In the dream, a fantasy monologue, the spirit escapes from "the dark iron of its dungeon, clay" (l. 2), and, again, surveys the immortality of the heroic dead:

... yea, the dead, white bones
Did stand up by the house whereto Death clings,
And dressed themselves in life, speaking of thrones,
And fame, and power, and beauty, in familiar tones (ll. 15-18).

These lines demonstrate the poet's descriptive power in her ability to conjure up a nightmare-impression (appropriate within the context of the dream-monologue) of the personified Death. Here the dead 'dress' themselves in the trappings of life - a grisly image which serves to emphasise the horror of physical death while contrasting it with this life, and the spiritual life beyond it. This symbolic device of the dead 'dressed' in life is a technique which Elizabeth used increasingly in her later work, where she presents incongruous images of the living dressed in shrouds and grave-clothes, or of the dead bedecked in the garments of the living. In The Dream an important idea emerges wherein Death is regarded as the product of human Sin (ll. 34-36), a Miltonic notion - and, indeed, earlier - but the poem ends on a hopeful note: the crucified Christ, who came to restore life by dying (l. 54) is seen as the key to the expectations of mortal humanity.

The final poem in the volume, The Vision of Fame, casts a doubtful shadow across the notion of fame as a path to immortality, as propounded throughout most of the preceding poems. In view of personal death (l. 41), and the death of one's mourners (ll. 42-8), Fame offers a false hope in promising survival through courageous acts of noble example (ll. 49-72). The hope is false because, in time, Fame too dies or passes away (ll. 77-92), leaving the poet unable to perceive any secure assurance of how mortal man can survive total annihilation. The style of the poem is, again, interesting; as in The Dream, it is written in the form of a dream, a device which effectively gives the impression that it is while in an entranced or dreaming state that

the poet's mystical speculations unfurl themselves. The notion of the dream as a state of abstraction also parallels the nature of the poet's transcendent wonderings concerning death and immortality.

Elizabeth's second volume of poetry, therefore, indicates a development in her thinking about the themes of death and immortality. Here, the mind is seen as the essence of the immortal individual and it is this which may survive in some form of spiritual existence. However, for the most part immortality is seen in terms of the survival of one's fame and example through acts of patriotism, bravery, or intellectual and artistic contributions to civilisation. Only The Dream offers the conventional possibility of immortality through the redemptive salvation of Christ; but the volume closes on a depressing note in The Vision of Fame, where personal fame, too, is regarded as 'mortal', and the speculative individual is left with no answer as to how the human personality can survive death. Finally, that both of these poems are written in monologue-form, as dreams, suggests respectively that the wonderings of the poet are personal, mental speculations and that a possible conclusion may be reached not by intellectual contemplation but, perhaps, through the seeming spontaneity of dreams or dream-like experiences. The poet is indicating, perhaps, the apprehension obtained by those who surrender themselves to ecstatic, mystical visions - or, more commonly, to the intuitive spiritual perceptiveness inherent in the individual consciousness. The conclusion of these insights is optimistic in The Dream, but not so in The Vision of Fame. However, regardless of the nature of the conclusions which can be reached after considering the subjects of death and immortality, in the final event it seems - as in the poet's case - that the surest conclusions are attained, optimistically, through a mental act of faith or, more darkly, through an intuitive conviction of doubt.

Elizabeth's third volume, Poems (1833) strikes a decidedly more optimistic note in the poet's thinking regarding human immortality. The book adopts an orthodox Christian attitude, exploring God as the supreme creative spirit who sustains the human soul in this life, and who, after death, receives to Himself the souls of the faithful.

The Tempest sets the more hopeful tone of the volume. It describes the poet's discovery in a storm of the body of a detested enemy, and her decision to stifle her hatred and give the corpse decent burial. Here, death is regarded as having a mission - again, almost in the personified sense of an old morality play in which Death is 'sent' to summon mankind to Judgement - and is ruthlessly efficient in the execution of this mission (ll. 56-64). The horror of death is rhetorically, though effectively, depicted in terms which recall a passage in Chaucer's The Knight's Tale (4). However, death now has its own sense of peace (l. 95), and is a positive force in eliminating grudges, bitterness and resentment (ll. 97-98). Moreover, the poet is now granted hope by a thought, which:

> ... gave a key,
> Empower'd to open out all mysteries
> Of soul and flesh; of man, who doth begin,
> But endeth not; of life, and after-life (ll. 121-24)

The positivism of the poet's thinking here is conveyed by her expression of a belief in the continuation of this human life. The 'tempest' of the poem's narrative represents the 'storm' in the poet's mind, for she is beset by resentment and bitterness towards her enemy, afraid of the prospect of death which his body forces her to acknowledge, and despairing at the idea of the total mortality of this human existence. By responding to her awakening spiritual intuitiveness, she emerges from the 'storm' able to face death (she inters her enemy),

her heart purged of all bitterness, her hope placed in immortality. The poet asserts the hope of transcending the flesh and, through the grace of God, of:

> ... that eternity to come,
> Where live the dead, and only Death shall die (ll. 202-3)

The latter line here is strongly reminiscent of the fourteenth line of Donne's Holy Sonnet Number Six: "And death shall be no more, Death thou shalt die".

Indeed, the only poem in this third volume which expresses an uncertain hope concerning the human condition is To a Boy, in which, although Hope "is risen" (l. 53), the poet is primarily aware of an oppressive sense of loss - loss of the boy's youth and joy, of happiness, of optimism.

For the most part, however, Poems (1833) turns towards the orthodox Christian hope in attempting to resolve the problems of death and immortality. Many of the poems echo earlier themes: A Sea-Side Meditation introduces the notion of the incompatibility of the flesh, and the spirit and mind (ll. 68-69, 141), and the idea of the poetic faculty - which should ideally be inspired by profound or traumatic experiences such as death (l. 36), being instead restricted and imprisoned by the grind of daily habit (ll. 42-48). Again, we read of the noble, the martyrs who "dying, utter lofty words" (l. 109).

Several poems return to the notion of attaining immortality through example, and of the importance of immortalising the dead through veneration or remembrance. Among these are The Picture Gallery at Penshurst (5), which expresses the notion of the dead being able in some sense to 'teach' the living (l. 9), while Algernon Sidney attains 'immortality' through his courageous death under an illegal death-sentence:

... he, who bled

Freely for freedom's sake, bore gallantly

His soul upon his brow (ll. 14-16).

The poem develops the important theme of survival through artistic creativity, declaring that Sir Philip Sidney is eternally remembered for his music and his vision of Arcadia (ll. 16-18), while 'Sacharissa,' whom Waller worshipped, although now "perish'd like her roses" (l. 37), is immortalised in the painting that captures her beauty. Her name is recorded (l. 50), and she is "by Memory won from Time's eternal burial" (ll. 50-51).

A contradictory poem on this theme is Minstrelsy, which asserts the incomprehensibility of the poet's love of music. The poem suggests that the poet will be remembered for her truth in love (l. 46), rather than for her love of Art. The enigma of aesthetic appreciation is rendered more complex by the fact that many are unable to love art because their hearts are too heavily "sheathed in clay" (l. 14), while the joy that some should experience through music is stifled by death or by a fear of dying (ll. 19-20).

Similarly, To the Memory of Sir Uvedale Price, Bart (6), asserts the poet's pain at the death of the baronet while stressing the need to continue remembering him. In this instance, he is immortalised not through a celebration of his virtues, but through simple - if painful - acts of remembering him and mourning him (ll. 62-69). The poet's voice here is highly personal; she speaks of a private grief, and, through the controlled expression of that grief by means of measured stanza and metre, she succeeds in evoking the reader's understanding and sympathy, creating an impression of restraint and sensitivity which would, perhaps, have been impossible if a more frenzied style

had been used:

My thoughts are far. I think upon the time,
When Foxley's purple hills and woods sublime
Were thrilling at thy step; when thou didst throw
They burning spirit on the vale below,
To bathe its sense in beauty. Lovely ground!
There, never more shall step of thine resound! (ll. 52-57)

These powerful lines express the essence of Elizabeth's view of the nature of the human spirit: that it is a profound and conscious entity, sensitive to beauty and, especially, to the beauty of the natural world which is embodied by artists in their creative works.

The Death-Bed of Teresa Del Riego, too, emphasises the need to recall the dead. As she dies, Teresa del Riego obtains comfort not from mourning her dead hero husband (see Note Two), but from concentrating upon his glorious example:

She wail'd not o'er his urn,
For he was dead - and in her hands, should burn
His vestal flame of honor radiantly.
Sighing would dim its light - she did not sigh.
She only died (ll. 30-34).

Here, as in the poem written on the death of Byron, in the previous volume, the religiosity of the style 'sanctifies' the death of the courageous hero who is thus elevated to charismatic status, while receiving veneration from the living that approaches that of religious devotion: the 'vestal flame' of Riego's honour is a pious sanctification of his memory, and an assertion of the spiritual 'purity' which he has attained beyond death, after a life of courage and integrity.

Because of the example of such figures, the poet implies that the living bear what amounts to a responsibility for recalling the dead

and immortalising them through remembrance, an idea expressed in Epitaph, where the dead are said to be due the respect of the living, since all come to death (l. 12).

The remaining poems in the volume all turn to the salvation of Christ as the key to personal immortality: Earth describes the destruction of the world of Nature (l. 28), of the wind (l. 42), but asserts that, despite the destructiveness of eschatological occurrences, all terminates in Christ (ll. 48-53). Similarly, in The Autumn, autumn is used by Elizabeth in a manner reminiscent of Keats' Ode to Autumn, as a symbol of loss and decay - "The summer flowers depart" (l. 6) - the passing of summer, and of youth - "Youth fades" (l. 29). Again, however, the poem asserts that hope lies in Heaven.

Remonstrance is an expression of the poet's mourning for her dead lover (stanza i). Bowed down by a sense of total waste, without hope, the 'Reply' (stanzas iv and v) urges her to seek comfort in Christ, who also bore death and deprivation (stanza v). The Image of God describes the poet's realisation that neither sun nor earth can lay claim to being God - nor, indeed, can the"deathless soul" (l. 18), because it is corrupted by "sin and shame and agony" (l. 21). Christ alone, who bore all of these, is Divine (ll. 29-32). The Appeal, at first sight asserting the omnipotence of Death (l. 16), then turns to Jesus as the only refuge (ll. 18-21), from "Death's gladitorial smile" (l. 16). Again, the effect of the personification - technique here is to define the abstract, cosmic struggle between Good and Evil in more simple terms as a duel between the two combatants, 'Death' and Christ. The poem asserts that they die in peace who die with the name of Jesus on their lips (ll. 63-68). A Vision of Life and Death, too, describes the soul's vision of Death as a destroyer (ll. 83-84), but Death is also regarded here as the power which delivers the soul from its physical prison

(l. 95), to the spiritual life of light and joy (ll. 96 and 100). Idols is a declaration of God's almighty power. Three other gods are false - Beauty and Fame, which perish, and Human Love which is destroyed when the loved one dies (ll. 25-26). As will be seen in Chapter Five, these ideas were somewhat modified by Elizabeth later, in her Sonnets from the Portuguese. Idols declares the true God to be the Lord, the Creator (ll. 31-36).

Similarly, To a Poet's Child signifies a rejection of fame as a key to salvation (l. 50), urging that the one solution is selfless love of others (l. 59), combined with a pronounced sense of hope (ll. 65-68). Nevertheless there is here room for the survivor to mourn the prospect of the child's death, for in that event his beauty, goodness and innocence would be lost from this world for ever (ll. 70-71).

The two final poems in the 1833 collection both end on a hopeful note: Hymn is a prayer beseeching God to succour the human heart. God's Ultimacy implies His total responsibility for life and Death (ll. 6-8); but the poem is a prayer for knowledge of the intuitively-felt realisation of God's power in terms of His continuing presence as Death approaches (l. 24). Finally, Weariness is an expression of the poet's spiritual tiredness in a world of transcience, death and mutability, in which "the fairest things" are "too soon decaying" (l. 2). The poet yearns here for the hope and peace of the life to come:

> Oh, for dove's wings, thou dwelling blest,
> To fly to thee, and be at rest (ll. 23-24).

This rather sentimental couplet is an expression of the poet's deepest faith in the after-life which, though simplistically conceived, is looked to with profound hope and expectancy from a life darkened by the inadequacies and unfulfilling mutability of this world.

It is evident, therefore, that the 1833 volume of poems marks a definite development in Elizabeth's concept of death and the human soul for, while the volume of 1826 ended on a gloomy note of the hopeless extinction of the individual consciousness which death brings, the 1833 volume marks a movement away from Fame and Remembrance as keys to immortality, and an increasing reliance upon Christ as the only hope for human survival of bodily death.

In 1838 Elizabeth published her fourth volume, entitled The Seraphim and other Poems. The preceding volume of 1833 had ended on a note of Christian hope; The Seraphim and other Poems showed a further development in this direction of Elizabeth's philosophy concerning death. In this collection the exploration of Christian themes became increasingly important and explicit. Of great significance is the poet's comment in the Preface to her volume, in which she stated: "'An irreligious poet', said Burns, meaning an undevotional one, 'is a monster'. An irreligious poet, he might have said, is no poet at all". ('Preface', The Seraphim and other Poems).

From this statement, therefore, it is evident that for Elizabeth the Christian message had now become a quintessential factor in her thinking and her poetic creativity, as well as in her attitude towards the questions of death, immortality and human survival of it. From the vaguer Christian hopefulness of the 1833 collection, therefore, the 1838 volume began on a firmly Christian note: the title-poem transports the reader to the very site and hour of the Crucifixion, to witness the agony and suffering of the dying Christ.

The seraphim Ador and Zerah, whose conversation forms the substance of The Seraphim, in fact shed little light upon Elizabeth's thinking about etheral entities: the two angels have human characteristics and are little more than rhetorical mouthpieces for the poet's

didacticism.. As Gardner B. Taplin observes: "The two seraphim speak ... all in the turgid diction with which Elizabeth always endowed angel tongues" (Taplin, p. 65). One must, of course, bear in mind that Elizabeth's intention was to write an allegory here, so that the seraphim are clearly to be regarded as mythological entities introduced to describe more easily a nebulous spiritual state or identity - in a similar way to the personified concept of 'Death' found throughout her work. They are therefore scarcely to be regarded as literal projections of the poet's thinking as to what a transcendent spiritual being could be like. In addition, since there is no possibility of obtaining direct knowledge of the precise nature of 'spiritual beings' - if, indeed, these exist, and whatever one may imply by the usage of the term - the poet must, of necessity, describe them in terms of human characterization, in order to communicate with readers who, like herself, are restricted in having purely terrestrial knowledge (7).

The importance of The Seraphim lies less in its revelation of the nature of spiritual spheres than in its emphasis of the distinctions betweenthis world and the world to come, between human nature and the essence of transcendent spirituality. This theme was, as we have seen, anticipated in earlier poems. In The Seraphim, the difference between heavenly and human beings is clearly defined: the seraphim are immortal (ll. 65 and 92), while the human individual will die (ll. 94-95). Again, in earthly spheres the spirit is bound to the 'sense' (ll. 158-59), and Earth is essentially deathly (ll. 146-7). The poem implies that this lack of spirituality, and subjection to death, are symptoms of Man's separation from God following the expulsion from Eden; so, too, is human sin. For the human race, death is "fearful" (l. 167), but Evil is worse than death (ll. 168-74). The earth was once without either death or sorrow (l. 182), but now, death is a "perpetual ban" on

the heart of Man (l. 271).

It was in order to save humanity from this spiritual privation, from Sin and Death, that Christ died. Through Christ's death, God will "touch death" (l. 243), for Christ is God Incarnate. The living disdain the dying Christ and his fellow-sufferers, the two thieves (ll. 469-71). However, because Christ is Divine, his death is "rather shine than shade" (l. 535). Christ is pure 'spirit' (l. 540). Therefore his death is unlike the deaths of other men: it is more than the expiration of a single human life, but signifies the "second Death" (l. 801) - that is, the destruction of sin and the enslavement of the human race to Death. Christ is dying for Earth's sinfulness (ll. 933-38).

In contrast to sinful, mortal humanity, the spiritual seraphim, transcending the human condition, have no immediate relationship with Christ's physical sufferings (ll. 612-13). In the Epilogue, however, the poet, aware of her mortality and the contrast between her nature and that of the seraphs (ll. 1025-6), prays that, through the grace of God, she may become one of their number (ll. 1045-1047). However, if in this notion we expect to determine something of what Elizabeth might have meant by a 'spiritual survival', we will be disappointed: human spirits freed from the flesh by death are, sentimentally, walking before the throne of God, clothed in white (l. 1051). Other comments in the Epilogue are similarly unhelpful. The poet observes merely that seraphs exist in heaven (ll. 1028-30), and are around her on the earth (ll. 1032-1033), while there is an obscure reference to other spiritual entities:

> Forgive me, that mine earthly heart should dare
> Shape images of unincarnate spirits
> And lay upon their burning lips a thought
> Cold with the weeping which mine earth inherits (ll. 1035-1038).

These lines seem to suggest little more than that the poet may be pardoned and spared from the mistake of imagining that there might exist any 'spirits' who are not of a supremely Divine nature, and attributing to them human despair and weakness.

The poem contains miscellaneous related references, to "the scent of tombs" (l. 340), "empty graves" (l. 954), and the dead who arose from "splitting tombs" at the time of Christ's Resurrection (ll. 1000-1002). To conclude, The Seraphim reveals little about Elizabeth's thinking concerning the nature of 'spirits' - but it is an assertion of her deep Christian conviction. The poem is a conventional - even sentimental - narrative describing the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Redemption, in which spiritual entities seem to be introduced more as mouth-pieces voicing Christian doctrines than as the opportunity for exploring the nature of 'spirits' and the possibility of human survival of physical death and the form which such survival might take.

However, the style of the poem (written in the form of a dialogue between the two seraphim), suggests the speculative nature of the discussion about Man, his fall and redemption through Christ, which the poet is exploring, because the voices of the seraphs are at once the meditative stances of the poet, and the disputatious speeches found in a platonic dialogue. Moreover, the role of the seraphs as dramatic characters conducting a dialogue enforces the narrative with a sense of urgency and immediacy, which, in turn, elevates the subject - the question of Man's position in the universe - to an issue of prime importance.

Speaking of this 1838 volume, Katherine H. Porter observes that it is "heavy with accumulated tears, the burden of sinning earth, and the imminence of death and the grave. Because such poems were in the fashion of the day, we can only conjecture the degree to which hers

were personal" (Porter, pp. 30-1).

In a sense such an observation is valid: no doubt Elizabeth was influenced by prevailing poetic taste and fashion, as indeed most artists are - even if such an influence takes the form of a particular artist's reaction against the conditions of his or her age - but in so far as Elizabeth's poems were nevertheless the product of her poetic consciousness then they were indisputably 'personal'. Indeed, an indication of this personal quality of the poems of 1838 is that they do reflect the poet's continuing interest in themes of death and mortality as explored in the preceding and succeeding volumes. Moreover, this is no less true than in the subjects of the 1838 poems which, though frequently morbid in tone and preoccupied with tears, sinning earth and the grave, are in keeping with what has been observed elsewhere as the drift in Elizabeth's thought - that is, her developing exploration of the theme of death within the context of Christianity. For example, The Poet's Vow fully reflects this notion. Here, a poet who devotes himself to an ascetic life-style, rejects his human involvements. Consequently his lover, Rosalind, pines away and dies (ll. 219-22). Grotesquely, she has arranged for her corpse to be sent to the poet, who then dies himself (l. 490). During the course of the poem, we learn too of the poet's mother's death (l. 190). There are also a number of images drawn from the subject of death: the poet is described sitting silently in his hall:

> As silent as its ancient lords
> In the coffined place of stone,
> When the bat hath shrunk from the praying monk,
> And the praying monk is gone.
> Nor wore the dead a stiller face
> Beneath the cerement's roll ... (ll. 21-26).

These evocative lines are decidedly 'gothic' in tone, and convey a menacing, ominous atmosphere appropriate to the sinister, grotesque nature of the theme. The poem also contains references to "graves below" (l. 97), while the poet describes Sir Roland's voice as being like "the noise of life to one anear his death" (ll. 244-45), which conveys a sense of the oppressive hopelessness inherent in the theme of the poem; there are also references to seraphs (ll. 214, 225). However, despite all this it is evident that Elizabeth's intention is not simply to scrutinise morbidly the subject of death: the grotesque theme is intended to assert that it is better to follow God (ll. 216-41), a positive notion, than to indulge in a selfish rejection of one's humanity (l. 266). Sir Roland tells his son that the lesson of the dead lovers is that the sympathy of human feelings and relationships must never be sacrificed in the name of an ascetic vow (ll. 500-509), a theme explored by Shakespeare, in a more light-hearted vein, in Love's Labour's Lost, and by Tennyson in The Princess.

The remaining poems in the volume develop themes already raised in previous works. Among these are the notion of the unreliability of human love within the context of Man's mortality, the theme of the individual who approaches death in a mood of nostalgic remembrance of recollected childhood, the concept of the natural world possessing spiritual qualities, and the belief in the integrity and visionary experience of the human soul.

Previous poems had suggested that mortal man can draw little comfort from human love (for example, Idols), and this depressing idea - one which, as has already been indicated, Elizabeth greatly modified in Sonnets from the Portuguese - occurs in several poems in the 1838 volume. The Romaunt of Margret, written in ballad-form, with a

repetitive line at the end of each stanza (8), explores the idea of the shadow as the spiritual attendant of the human body, conversing with the consciousness. The shadow disillusions the dying Margret of her faith in the love of her brother, sister, father and lover. Bereft of hope, she dies and is laid in state (l. 225). Margret's belief that the absence of any faith in love is akin to the state of death itself (ll. 98-99), is contradicted by the shadow's assertion that "the death-worm" is stronger than human love (l. 215). Other images in the poem explore the preoccupation with death and spirituality: the moonlight on Margret's brow is "like a spirit's hand" (l. 23), an effective simile which fully conveys the mysterious, etheral quality of moonlight. Similarly, Margret's own shadow lies on the river just as "the steadfast doom of death "lies "upon the course of life" (ll. 44-45). In this poem, the most relevant image from the point of view of present purposes, is probably the shadow itself. By its usage Elizabeth no doubt did not intend to imply a belief in an 'astral body', spiritual in form and nature but inextricably related to the physical body; rather, the shadow appears to signify the spirit or soul itself, ever-present, but inscrutable, clearly a reality, but nebulous and unfathomable. It is this 'shadow' which represents the visionary and intuitive aspect of Margret - again, like the transcendent soul of the human individual.

Similarly, in The Exile's Return, the exile learns of the fickleness of human love. She returns to discover that her lover has grown cold toward her (stanza iii), as if, indeed, she had literally died. The poem again draws on death for its imagery, describing the emotional deadness of the 'cold' lover as a "mound of funeral clay" (l. 26).

Perhaps as the invalid Elizabeth watched the years pass by, bringing little prospect of human romantic love, her mind came to

abandon Love as a key to spiritual happiness. This notion is explored in a number of the poems in this volume, where Divine love is sometimes offered as a superior compensation for the mortality of human relationships. In Isobel's Child, for example, the mother is exhorted by her dying baby to cease praying for his survival, allowing him to die and pass to eternity. The effect of the baby's philosophical speech to his mother is quite absurd, but the point of the poem is nevertheless sustained: that the attainment of Heaven through death is superior to any human relationship (in this case not a sexual attachment but the bond between mother and child). Similarly, in A Romance of the Ganges (another poem in ballad-form with a repeated line at the end of each stanza), the maiden Luti learns that her lover will be faithless (l. 88). She has already lost her father (l. 76), whose love she cherished (l. 89), and so she now makes a new, unearthly resolution:

> From earth's cold love I look above
> To the holy house of snow (ll. 97-98).

(The latter is a reference to Heaven: Indra, one of the main Hindu deities, was traditionally believed to dwell on the peak of Mount Meru, in the snow-capped Himalayas).

All this, one should note, is, however, contrary to the argument of The Poet's Vow, which is an affirmation of the invaluable quality of human love as an ideal. That the poet therefore included contrary poems on the subject of love, in this volume, may well imply that she had not finally abandoned love as an ideal - although it is true that she writes more of the fickleness of love than of its permanence, fidelity and strength.

Those poems which express a nostalgic recollection of the past do so most frequently within the context of death. In The Deserted Garden, the poet as a child was aware that the old lady who formerly owned

the garden had died (ll. 39-40). The child's sorrow is eclipsed, however, by her enjoyment of the garden (ll. 49-50), and it is only in adulthood that her thoughts turn to more sombre subjects - her wasted life and anguish. In Night and the Merry-Man, the merry man, remembering both the joys and sorrows of his earlier life, optimistically believes that his recollected griefs, too, will "with the rest sepulchred be" (l. 102). His philosophical contemplation is rendered more important in its presentation as a dialogue between Night and the merry man, or, rather, as the latter's reply to Night. Earth and her Praisers describes the poet's ecstacy as a child free in the natural world. Significantly from the point of view of present purposes, however, are those in the poem who praise the earth for its deathly associations - the mourner, who praises the earth where he will lie with his dead lover (ll. 93 and 104), and the Christian, who praises the earth as God's garden and as the resting-place of the bones of saints (ll. 210 - 16). Other relevant references and images here include the angel (l. 7), and the tombs (l. 13), which are significant for their presence in the system of this world which is orientated, according to the poem, towards death and decay.

Memory and Life is an allegory in which Memory - the memory of pain and suffering - 'kills' Hope (ll. 39 - 40), who is then 'resurrected' by Christ (ll. 45-6). Victoria's Tears celebrates the accession of Queen Victoria in 1837. The Queen must now forget her childhood happiness and turn to the affairs of state. The poem also recalls the death of the previous king, William IV (ll. 2-4). Sentimentally, perhaps, the patriotic verse concludes by asserting that Victoria's crown in heaven will be worn more joyfully than she wore on earth (ll. 47- 50). The related poem to this - The Young Queen - is preoccupied with death, the death of the late King, whose lying-in-state, funeral and

mourning court is ludicly described (stanzas i - iii). The poem's concentration upon the pathos of death, the sense of passing time and of the past, is reflected also in the references to the deaths of Victoria's father, Edward Duke of Kent (1767-1820) (l. 30), and of the infant heir of Charlotte Augusta (1796-1817), father of George IV (l. 33).

The Pet-Name, another celebration of childhood happiness, also concerns the death of the poet, who believes that, when she is dead, the 'pet-name' will be forgotten (ll. 13-15). This name is a mark of the love which her brother bears for her (stanza vii). The poem's final assertion is in a sense a refutation of much of the inference of this volume when it declares that, although the pet-name will 'die', the love between the poet and her brother will not: love is immortalised, and heightened "with Heaven" (ll. 68-70). One should remember, however, that here Elizabeth is writing from the point of view of a specific relationship - the close love between herself and her brother Edward, whom she nick-named 'Bro', which his pet-name for her was 'Ba' - an appellation which Browning later used for her. Therefore the other poems in the volume which reject the relationships between lovers, are no less piquant for the impression of intense inter-communion between brother and sister in The Pet-Name. Again, the sense of pathos created by the poet's statement that the pet-name will die, whereas their love has an eternal quality (the nature of which, however, the poet does not explore), is emphasised by the directness of the poet's monologue as she discusses her nick-name. Once more, the poem assumes an ironic significance when one considers that, only two years after the publication of the poem here, 'Bro' was drowned in 1840, and the 'pet-name' was never again uttered by him. The poem is another profound expression of Elizabeth's love for her brother, and may be a further indication

of the intensity of feeling which motivated Elizabeth's deep interest in Spiritualism.

Some of the remaining poems in the volume have much to say with regard to the spiritual life. In this respect, Isobel's Child is again significant: while death is inevitable (l. 121), there is an "immortality" (l. 135), suggesting that, through life and death, there is a form of 'higher life'. The poet speaks of passing "Through life and death to life again" (l. 137). This notion is similar to what Blake appeared to be suggesting in Songs of Innoncence and of Experience, where he describes a process of attaining 'higher innocence' through a loss of innocence via experience. A young child or spiritually undeveloped individual seems, for Blake, to be living in a state of 'innocence'. This state is corrupted through experience - the experience of life. However, beyond this there lies the state of 'higher innocence', the situation which an individual may reach where he or she has acquired the knowledge and wisdom which the child's pure innocence lacked, but has transcended the corruption of experience, to a position where the moral qualities of innocence can be grasped by the individual in 'higher innocence' for their own sake, and not simply because they are the sum total of that individual's knowledge (as in the case of the child).

Blake's theory presents an interesting parallel with Elizabeth's cyclic concept of movement from this limited life, through the apparent loss of death, to the transcendent 'higher life' of the spirit. However, in Isobel's Child the latter state is conceived in disappointingly sentimental terms. The poet speaks of standing:

> At God's right hand,
> Lifting up those sleeping eyes
> Dilated by great destinies,
> To an endless waking (ll. 146-49)

On the other hand, the poem introduces a new concept in the possibility of a 'hell'. In view of the sentimental picture of Heaven, however, the image of hell is more acceptable - as an image, that is. Hell is, quite simply, a "Godless place" where human energy is "cold, strong, objectless, like a dead man's clasp" (ll. 53, 155). The latter simile is appropriate because it conveys a sense of the grisly, chilling nature of 'hell', and because 'hell' is the place to which the dead who have rejected God have exiled themselves. Here we find no pits of sulphur or hell-fire, but a negativity which confronts the spirit, locked up within its own selfishness, within its own despair (l. 159). The traditional Christian concept of death and after-life is asserted at the end of the poem, when the child dies, for this event is not an occasion for mourning, but for rejoicing: the child has not perished, but attained immortality, and Isobel is not deprived, but enlightened; she declares:

> We are waking - he and I -
> I, on earth, and he, in sky (ll. 523-24).

Relevant images and phrases in the poem include "life in death" (l. 329), the soul (ll. 368, 398), angels (ll. 404,466), cherubim and seraphim (l. 452), and the mystic winged creatures of Revelation (ll. 446, 453). As before, scholarship is rejected as a means of resolving the enigmas of death and immortality:

> Do the students' lamps that burn
> All night, illumine death? (ll. 462-63).

Part of the poem includes a number of couplets, similar in form and content, which create a ballad-like impression (ll. 233-34, 243-44), 252-53), and again serve to suggest that the story includes some argument or point of view - that is, the thinking which it contains concerning death and survival - which is being deliberately presented

for didactic or other purposes.

Again, in The Student, although the survival of the soul is asserted as a reality (l. 1-2), fame, intellect and study are rejected as keys to immortality (ll. 56-70). When the student dies (ll. 34-37), his immortality is seen not to depend upon his famed scholarship or his academic reputation, but his spirituality. This notion signifies a movement away from the idea of the individual's ability to survive through political or artistic 'works', as expressed in earlier poems. The structure of the poem is effective in conveying to the reader the significance of the student's death. The first part of the poem consists of the student's monologue, and the reader is made dramatically aware of the finality of his death by the fact that, when he dies, the omniscient poet herself must assume the narrative-stance in order to continue and complete the poem(l. 34). One is therefore left with a sense of the inevitability and sinister abruptness of death, through the removal of the student-narrator half way through the poem.

However, some poems in the 1838 collection do uphold the view that one can survive through artistic or other achievements. To Bettine is in a sense a celebration of the death of Goethe in 1832 (especially ll. 39-40), while Cowper's Grave venerates both the past example of the dead poet Cowper (1731-1800), in his allegiance and fidelity to Christ (l. 19), and his diligence and dedication to his divinely-ordained role as a poet (l. 13), immortalising himself with his "deathless singing" (l. 5). The poet imagines Cowper's heavenly ecstasy, the experience akin to his earthly poetic vision, his "rapture" (l. 56). Felicia Hemans concerns the poetess of that name, and is dedicated to Letitia Landon, another poet (9). While Letitia Landon venerates dead poets (l. 1), the hope is expressed that she may, indeed, be inspired by them (l. 5). Mrs. Hemans, the poem asserts, died in Christ (stanza vii), and the

final stanza of the poem expresses the wish that, when dead, Letitia Landon may also be 'immortalised' as a poet in the sense that Mrs. Hemans is (ll. 29-32).

Poems such as these reveal that Elizabeth continued to regard poetic creativity as a spiritual activity in itself, of Divine origin in so far as it derives from the mind or soul, the immortal or divine elements of the human individual. In addition, of course, the poet as an imaginative creator parallels the Concept of God, the universal creator. It is therefore implied that the 'poetic faculty', essentially of a spiritual nature, is the Divine element implanted in the human consciousness, and that it is this faculty, this spiritual essence, the soul, which is released at death to rejoin the Creator in what amounts to a transcendent process resembling the Buddhist concept of the attainment of Nirvana. Simultaneously, through fame and reputation, the poet gains 'immortality' not only in the essence of the Divine but in terms of human society as well.

The volume is consistent in its hopeful vision of death within the context of the Christian system. Death is seen as inevitable, but God's omniscience is asserted, and His kingdom is seen as the sure home of the faithful. An Island, which is a personal vision of Utopia, is significantly without death (l. 127), and while the soul yearning for spiritual peace is urged to resign itself to the will of God (l. 168), the reader is warned against frustrating the divine intention by selfish human wilfulness (ll. 175-76). My Doves, asserting rather sentimentally that Man wears "immortal wings within" (l. 72), unifies this human quality of the spirit to God (ll. 83-84). In Stanzas, the poet is resigned to Death's inevitability (ll. 6-8).

Bereavement and Consolation from a contrasting unit of poems. The former is a cry against God made within the context of the poet's loss of all those whom she has loved; therefore she refuses to praise God (ll. 5-8). The centrality of God to the concept of death is stressed in Consolation, which states that, despite bereavement, there are always those who remain alive, to love the mourner:

> All are not taken; there are left behind
> Living Beloveds, tender looks to bring
> And make the daylight still a happy thing,
> And tender voices, to make soft the wind (ll. 1-4).

Even if this is not so, and the lonely mourner has lost all those whom she loved to Death, there remains the all-embracing love of God (ll. 12-14). The juxtaposition of Bereavement and Consolation which balance each other by presenting opposing attitudes towards death (the negatively resentful, the optimistically hopeful), have the effect of suggesting a mental dialogue on the part of the philosophical poet. Moreover, that the second of the two is the more positive suggests less uncertainty in the poet's conclusions than would be implied had the order been reversed; as they read, however, the optimism of Consolation is a reply to the despair of Bereavement - an effective use of order and structure on the part of the poet.

The Christian tone of the volume is reflected in many of the other poems, including The Virgin Mary to the Child Jesus (in which the Virgin believes that, in dying, she will "live most", l. 37), The Sleep, which sees death as the ultimate form of the Divine gift of sleep (ll. 49-54), and the series of four hymns A Supplication for Love, The Mediator, The Weeping Saviour and The Measure, which describes Man's

inevitable return to dust (ll. 6-7), and is a prayer for God's patient love to endure until the poet's eyes are, rhetorically, filled "with the dry dust of death" (l. 20).

Other poems which cast light upon the poet's thinking regarding the relationship between Man and death include The Weakest Thing, which regards "the darkening deathly curse" (l. 21), as the transcendent process whereby the weakest aspect of human beings - the heart - will become "the Strongest of the universe" (l. 23). What precisely is meant by the 'heart' remains, however, unclarified. Possibly the reference is to the fickleness of the affections, the fallibility of the conscience or of the judgement. More likely, however, the term 'Heart' means 'soul' which, though restrained in life, tainted with sin and unable to perceive spiritual Truth because of its servitude to bodily needs and impulses will, at death, be released, all traces of sin extinguished, in the ecstasy of eternal bliss. The Sea-Mew introduces the image of the seagull as a symbol of freedom and purity. When caught and caged by mankind, the gull dies; thus the touch of Man is like the touch of death, just as human sin destroys spiritual grace and perfection (ll. 41-45). Sounds describes the contrasting conditions of this world, where the poet's joy in the natural world is clouded by her perception of the sharp juxtaposition between the glee of a child at play and the sorrow of a funeral (ll. 48-49), between a bride and a widow (ll. 50-51). Contrastingly, lovers vow eternal love while seated on a grave (l. 73), and the living walk in awe of "the awful Dead" (l. 96). The poet looks to God as a resolution to the chaotic contrasts and confusing juxtapositions of this world. For God is All, and above everything else He provides the answer to human fear and restlessness, for he declares:

My right hand hath thine immortality
In an eternal grasping (ll. 125-26).

In this all-important role of sustaining Saviour, therefore, the poet asks if, of all the sounds which the human individual may hear, should he or she above all not hear "the voice of God?" (l. 137).

The Soul's Travelling probably casts more light than any of the other poems in the 1838 volume, upon Elizabeth's thinking with regard to the surviving human spirit. This world is seen as both structurally complex and confusing, including in its system not only joy and happiness, but the anguish of death as well (ll. 25-26), and the grief of funerals (ll. 45-49, 55-58). However, the ecstatic state of the disembodied human spirit is seen by the poet as compensation for the sufferings of life, and in its pure simplicity and freedom it offers a form of resolution of life's complexity and oppressiveness. The spirit, then, enjoys liberty and unrestrained movement (ll. 91-92, 104-105), and is granted ultimate perception. It is more at peace in the rural scene than in the city (stanza vi), hence it rejects the city with its clamour, corruption and squalor, for the bliss of rustic simplicity and harmony. The message of the spirit to despondent humanity is to sustain belief in the unity of the earth and its role within the Divine scheme; this alone can preserve mortal humanity from fear of the grave (ll. 163-66). The spiritual state is seen as one of almost total silence (that is, peace and restfulness in contrast with the clamour of life), a silence which engulfs the spirit in absolute repose and tranquility (ll. 167-72). However, the suggestion is not that the soul is absorbed into a supreme state of bliss with the consequent annihilation of the individual spirit's own identity and personality, for the silence is imprinted both with the "grandeur" and the "sorrow" of the individual soul (ll. 173-74). Thus the immortal spirit,

removed from the physical body, yet forms a unity with that body by retaining, and by conveying to its new spiritual situation:

> That deathly odour which the clay
> Leaves on its deathlessness alway (ll. 175-76).

Finally, of course, the form of the poem as the soul's monologue attributes a personality to the soul which tends to offset the notion that the spiritual life implies a loss of personality and the concept of survival merely in terms of the individual's 'cosmic energy'.

In the 1838 volume, therefore, Elizabeth continued to explore the themes of death and immortality in poems which often seem morbid and, at times, sentimental - even grotesque. Constantly she emphasises the soul's survival within the Christian framework. Death is therefore tragic only for the mourner, though its pathos is accentuated if one considers it from the point of view of the past and of childhood, a consideration which relates to the painful transcience of human experiences. Significantly, human love is more often rejected then upheld as a key to personal happiness and fulfilment - as are scholarship and intellect, though there are exceptions in both cases. Indeed, the notion most persuasively argued throughout the volume is that the creative faculty is part of individual spiritual awareness, and that it is this which is released after death. It appears that Elizabeth did not consider that individual souls return after death to a spiritual plane where they form part of a cosmic-whole, but rather (in keeping with the ideas of spiritualists) that the soul somehow retains its earthly identity and distinctness. This view is suggested in The Soul's Travelling, which expresses a simplistic, disappointing notion of the spiritual life, although it does assert that to die means neither extinction nor absorption, but to preserve transcendentally the uniqueness which constitutes individuality.

Notes to Chapter Four

(1) Alethea Hayter, Mrs. Browning (London, 1962), p. 222.

(2) Rafael del Riego y Nunez (1785-1823), Spanish patriot, was active during the Peninsula War against Napoleonic domination of Spain, a leader of the Spanish Revolution of 1820, and a member of the Cortes (1822-3). He was captured while resisting the intervention of the Holy Alliance, and condemned to death. His wife - at the time a refugee in London - made every effort, through Polignac, the French ambassador, to secure the assistance of the French Government, but in vain. Riego was executed on November 7th, 1823, and his widow died of grief a year later.

(3) Constantine Rhiga, or Rhigas or Rigas (c. 1760-1798), Greek patriot and poet, planned an uprising designed to liberate Greece from Turkish rule. One of his treacherous compatriots, however, betrayed his plot to the Austrian police, and the Austrian government delivered him into the hands of the Turks. Several rescue attempts to bring him to safety failed, and when two Turkish executioners arrived in his prison to despatch him, he snapped his bonds and felled one of them to the ground. The Pasha feared that a disturbance would accompany his public execution, so he was shot in prison and his body was thrown into the Danube. It was his call to battle that the Greeks sang in 1821 when they rose against Turkish rule.

(4) An interesting comparison between The Tempest (ll. 158-187), and the passage in The Knight's Tale (ll. 1975-2050) where the Temple of Mars is described, indicates a possible influence here upon Elizabeth's descriptive style: [The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales, ed. F. N. Robinson (London, 1957) ll. 1975-2050].

(5) Penshurst Place in Penshurst, Kent, was the home of the Sidney family. It is a quadrangular mansion with a court, chapel and hall (c. 1341), covered by an open timber roof and a minstrels' gallery. Gardner B. Taplin suggests that Elizabeth may have visited the house "on her return to Herefordshire from Hastings in the spring of 1826", (Taplin, p. 48).

The picture gallery at the house contains a number of valuable portraits and landscapes by Rubens and others, while the Tapestry Room Picture-Closet contains portraits of Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586), Algernon Sidney (1622-1683), Mary Sidney, countess of Pembroke, and Vandyke's portrait of 'Sacharissa', Lady Dorothea Sidney, whom the poet Waller (1606-1682) sought to marry, but in vain.

Sir Philip Sidney, Algernon Sidney and the 'Sacharissa' portrait are all mentioned in Elizabeth's poem. Algernon Sidney was, again, one whom she admired for the courage with which he faced death. He was a colonel in the Parliamentary army during the Civil War who, after the Restoration, was accused of involvement in the Rye-house plot, and illegally sentenced to death.

(6) Sir Uvedale Price (1747-1829) was a writer on the 'picturesque', a skilled musician and an artist. He was a friend of Charles James Fox, Sheridan and Wordsworth.

He inherited his father's fortune and was an innovator in the landscaping of gardens. He became Sherrif of Hereford in 1793, and, a friend of the leading Whigs, was created a Baronet in 1828. His estate at Foxley, near Hereford, was close enough to Elizabeth's childhood home near Malvern, for them to develop a friendship despite the difference in their ages. They

shared a common interest in the classics, and Sir Uvedale encouraged Elizabeth in her early poetry (Taplin,pp. 23-24). Her poem written in his memory was a "tribute to a friendship for which she had been sincerely grateful" (Taplin, p. 49).

(7) This problem is relevant to all discussions involving reference to spiritual states or entities within the context of any related 'religious' consideration: when referring to 'spiritual beings' the limitations of human knowledge necessitate that one speaks of these 'beings' in terms of human character and personality. It is therefore to be taken for granted that, in religious art, 'angels' and saints in heaven are depicted in human form, and the artist or theologian will be fully aware that this humanity of the spiritual entity is no more than a symbol used for easy portrayal or discussion of this entity.

However, it could be said that, in speaking of spiritual beings, Elizabeth at times appears to give the impression of relying too heavily upon the human symbols as representations of their spiritual 'originals'. This, indeed, is a major failing in the doctrinal terminology of spiritualists, who sometimes project an image of 'spirits' and the 'spirit world' which is too literally an imitation of human personalities and an idealised version of this world. C. S. Lewis rejected the common Spiritualist notion of

> family reunions 'on the further shore', pictured in entirely earthly terms. But that is all unscriptural, all out of bad hymns and lithographs. There's not a word of it in the Bible. And it rings false. We know it couldn't be like that. Reality never repeats. The

exact same thing is never taken away and given back. How well the Spiritualists bait their hook! 'Things on this side are not so different after all'. There are cigars in Heaven. For that is what we should all like. The happy past restored,

[A Grief Observed (London, 1961), p. 23].

(8) Speaking of the repetitive 'chorus' element in the ballad, Alex Preminger asserts: "Repetition in heightened passages was brilliantly explained by Coleridge as the singers' effort to discharge emotion that could not be exhausted in one saying", [Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics (London, 1965), pp. 62-3].

Throughout the rest of this study, it will become evident that Elizabeth makes considerable use of 'ballad' form in her poems, introducing short choruses at the end of stanzas, or repetitive final lines - sometimes beginning each line of a new stanza with the same, or a similar, sentence or phrase.

This technique, therefore, apart from illustrating Elizabeth's interest in archetypes, folk-lore, legends and folk-literature (hence her interest in 'ballad-forms'), serves to emphasise the poet's argument through the repetition which embodies an intense emotional concentration of meaning and expression. The technique also seems to have an effect similar to Brechtian methods of 'alienating' the audience. By offering to the reader a concentrated narrative with a repeated chorus-like line, the poet seems to be presenting the reader with a highly structured story, selected and compressed for its 'moral' content; the presence of the 'chorus' intensifies the reader's appreciation of the 'fictional' nature of the work, enabling the reader to adopt an objective attitude towards it, accentuating

his or her awareness of the 'didactic' message contained within it. Frequently Elizabeth's 'ballads' convey the 'moral' of their stories through this technique: one is aware of being presented with a highly concentrated folk-tale, chosen for its didactic 'lesson', from which (through the presence of the chorus) one is able to withdraw to perceive the message more readily.

(9) Felicia Hemans (1793-1835), née Browne, was a poet born in Liverpool. She married Captain Alfred Hemans in 1812, but the two separated in 1818, Hemans leaving the country never to see his wife again. Mrs. Hemans knew Scott, Wordsworth and Archbishop Whately. She wrote religious verse and hymns, but was chiefly reknowned for her lyrics, such as Casabianca, The Homes of England, and The Forest Sanctuary.

Letitia Elizabeth London (1802-1838) was a minor poet and novelist, who used the pen-name 'L.E.L' (the designation used by Elizabeth in her dedication). In 1838 - the year that this volume was published - Letitia London married George Maclean, Governor of the Cape Coast, Africa. She died in Cape Coast Castle the same year, of prussic-acid poisoning, and although her surgeon failed to conduct a post-mortem, it is likely that she was murdered by her husband's discarded mistress. She published several volumes of poetry, novels including Ethel Churchill (1837), and a tragedy Castruccio Castracani (1837).

Chapter Five: 'Poems' (1844), and 'Sonnets from the Portuguese'(1847-50)

Poems (1844) and Sonnets from the Portuguese (1847-50) are collections which have great significance in terms of Elizabeth's poetic development and of her spiritual thinking. In 1840 she had lost her brother, an event which had plunged her into gloom and despondency. Poems (1844) signifies how, in the years immediately following that event, Elizabeth was able to effect a partial resolution of her loss, in terms of her Christianity. She was yet to have experience of the 'revelations' of Spiritualism. Poems (1844), therefore, is the work of a mind to whom death and personal loss through death was especially traumatic; its deep Christian conviction, though doubtless of a stoical nature, is an indication of the poet's strength of character. Sonnets from the Portuguese implies a further development in the poet's thinking. The collection continues to be probably the most popular work of Elizabeth's; whereas Poems (1844) is a stoical resolution based upon the destruction of a loving relationship by death, Sonnets from the Portuguese is an expression of the profound love which Elizabeth felt for Browning, whom she met a year after the publication of Poems (1844). It would be true to say that in the Sonnets we find the power of depth and feeling that characterised that relationship, which was to prove the lasting happiness and joy of Elizabeth and which elevated her mood from the depressing morbidity which could be said to typify her earlier volumes.

Writing of Poems (1844), Katherine H. Porter observes: "Behind the poems of her 1844 volume, as over against those of 1838, there is a more intimate knowledge of death and a greater consciousness of pain" (Porter, p. 32). In view of the date of their publication, following

the death of 'Bro', one would indeed expect this to be true: but it is also important to remember that this is a hopeful 'Christian' volume in which consolation is as essential a part of the volume's didactic as the acute sense of loss and of death which it also explores. Elizabeth herself clearly regarded the composition of the volume as an important event in her poetic career, for she wrote: "the first poem of this collection, the 'Drama of Exile' is the longest and most important work (to me!) which I ever trusted into the current of publication" (Preface, Poems, 1844).

Significantly, the volume opens with a poem concerning the human situation immediately following the Fall, and it closes with The Dead Pan, a poem which Elizabeth insisted to her publishers be left at the end of the volume (Taplin, p. 122), and one which celebrates the death of Hellenic paganism at the time of Christ's birth. Thus the volume suggests an even firmer Christian stance on the part of the poet, opening with the Fall and closing with the birth of the Saviour.

Regarding Elizabeth's thinking concerning death and the after-Life, however, the volume in fact reiterates themes and preoccupations which the earlier volumes had already discussed. The difference lies in the fact that in the 1844 volume they are explored with greater optimism and sensitivity, as Gardner B. Taplin asserts: "Most of the poems now seem diffuse, sentimental and trite" (Taplin, p. 132). In the 1844 volume, therefore, we find Christian didacticism, the idea of the poet as an 'immortal creator', the Christian solution for grief and loss caused by death, the notion of immortality through remembrance, and the concept of death as an inevitable part of human experience, as a factor which renders all men equal. Again, a great deal of the poet's imagery is drawn from the subject of death, and many poems explore a situation involving death as their subject.

The main poem in the volume, A Drama of Exile, concerns Adam's fall, which is regarded by the poet as his " death" (l. 422). Again, through Lucifer's influence and activity, the world will become impregnated with "graves" and "funerals" (ll. 70, 76). The Fall is described as "this curse of death and winter" (l. 1132). Man's sinfulness conveys "a sense of death" (l. 1148), while God's role, after the Fall, is "to give rebuke or death" (l. 1168). Lucifer's spoilage of God's creation is the cause of Man's "fears of death" in the light of "the thought of death being always imminent" (ll. 1450-1451). Man's soul was "made perfect" (l. 164), but now heaven is for the angels alone (ll. 94-7), and earth the dominion of Lucifer (ll. 114-15, 203, 206). Man's Fall makes him subject to physical 'death', and this death is totally inevitable (ll. 497-99). As a fallen creature, victim of this "death-curse" (l. 1480), he will be reduced to dust (ll. 1487-1491), and the "little worm" will "reign ... o'er the noble human heart" (ll. 1492-1495). At death, Man, now fallen, will recall his former bliss and fearfully contemplate his approaching doom (ll. 263-66). Eve regards herself as falling "down the slope of death" (l. 1567), and her misery frequently causes her to voice a death-wish (ll. 526-36, 919-22), which even Adam's love for her cannot offset (l. 503), although he reasons with her, asserting that it is for God, not Man, to decide when death must strike (ll. 919-26, 1572-1577, 1693-1695).

It is evident, therefore, that in the poet's view human death was the immediate consequence of Sin (ll. 1848-9), and while Sin came by Eve, so, too, will Christ. Christ, in turn, will bring spiritual immortality to the human race through his birth, life and redemptive suffering (ll. 1959-1995). He will bring "The heavenly life and compensative rest" (l. 1850), for Christ conquers Death (ll. 1980-6). That human death is to be succeeded by a spiritual life, is stated by

Adam, who speaks "of Death and the hereafter" (l. 1896). God has the mastery over "the deed of death" (l. 1998), and mankind must believe in Him and keep faith (ll. 1998-2000), for it is clear that, far from being a finality, death leads on to eternity (ll. 2074-2114). The poet places faith too in a Second Coming, when the dead shall arise (ll. 2115-2128). Finally, the poem ends with an allegorical sequence in which Christ, the 'Tamer', leads the horse of Death to the throne of God, where the "Death-steed" dies (ll. 2129-2186).

The poem, then, asserts the validity of the Christian scheme of Death, Judgement, Heaven and the doctrine of the Second Coming. From the point of view of immortality, however, the poet is naturally unable to give clear indications of the nature of the 'soul' in the spiritual life: since during Adam and Eve's life-time technically no human-being had died to pass on to a spiritual after-life, the poet cannot describe the state and nature of human 'spirits'. Supernatural beings which are introduced into the work - the angels (including Lucifer and Gabriel), the Eden spirits (spirits of the trees, the rivers, birds and flowers), the spirits of inorganic and organic nature, the choruses of Infant, Youthful, Poet, Philosophical and Revel Voices, the chorus of invisible angels, and the earth-spirits - all of these have human personalities and speak with human voices, and so are misleading if they were to be interpreted as indicative of what Elizabeth's belief in the nature of a 'spirit' might be. As in The Seraphim, it is of course essential to remember that the poet's concern is with a mythological structure and with 'characters' who are allegorical or of symbolic significance, so these human-like 'angels' should obviously not be considered as literal, realistic figures. Moreover, since Elizabeth had no more idea of what so-called 'disembodied spirits' could be like than anyone else, the only way in which she could portray and discuss these entities would, of necessity, be in human form and with human attributes. This fact

is made clear in traditional conceptualization of God, who is usually granted male, patriarchal attributes in most monotheistic religions. However, one interesting idea which emerges from the poem is the possibility implied in the concept of the Inorganic Nature Spirit. The Organic and Inorganic Nature Spirits materialise to converse with Adam and Eve (l. 1034). The Organic Spirit is revealed to be the spirit of the earth in a physical sense - geographically, geologically - while the Inorganic Spirit speaks as the spirit of all living creatures. The implications behind the phenomena are complex and enigmatic: it is possible that they are merely poetic devices which should not be viewed within the context of the poet's philosophy; on the other hand, it is tempting to view them as a dual-representation of a world-soul concept which may indeed have formed part of Elizabeth's metaphysical thinking. Between them, the two spirits embody all aspects of the physical and animal worlds. If this is their significance, it is not easy to reconcile them with the Christian framework of the poem, since they do imply a distinction between their own status and that of Christ. This, in turn, would raise difficulties in the relationship between Christ's Godhead and the all-embracing significance of the two spirits. One solution to the problem would be to regard them all - Christ and the two spirits - as different aspects of the one God. This would bring into question Christ's own status, and undermine, or cause difficulties with, the doctrine of the Trinity. Again, if these spirits embody all Nature, how far are they distinct from the concept of God Himself, the Creator of the world, whose Spirit permeates throughout His Creation? Are the spirits simply His servants, like Gabriel and the other angels? Yet their role seems, if anything, of far greater importance, for they are more than mere messengers, but the embodiment of the entire creation. There are additional problems too in the

relationship between the two 'spirits' themselves: although they are presented as a balanced duality, the Spirit of Inorganic Nature appears of far greater importance, embodying the higher forms of life, and not simply the physical earth which the Organic Spirit represents. At this point it is tempting to view simply the Inorganic Spirit as indicative of a 'world-soul' concept, since it embodies living things whose consciousnesses are superior to that of the mere, lifeless physical earth, which the Organic Spirit embodies. In the final event it is probable that the significance of these spirits is that they are simply personifications of the earth and animal life which have no higher spiritual value within the mythology of the poem. As derivatives of the poet's pantheism, however, they raise interesting questions regarding the possible spiritual significance of that pantheism: it is possible that Elizabeth believed in the power of Nature as the physical expression of the divine spirit of God, that the force of Nature embodies the quintessential being of God, or that God expresses Himself primarily in terms of the movement and seasonal rotation of the natural world.

It is important to note that these Spirits of Organic and Inorganic Nature are not simply nucleii of spiritual identity, but seem to have a moral awareness akin to that of God Himself. The Spirit of Organic Nature tells Adam that the footsteps of himself and Eve strike to the Spirit "A sense of death ... and undug graves!" (l. 1148). This notion would seem to sustain the pantheistic theory behind the spirits, who would seem to be more than mere personifications, therefore, but morally conscious, sensible and sensitive entities capable of being aware of Adam's sinfulness and the deathly implications of it.

It is interesting to note how the poet introduces spiritual terminology into the poem, implying that the 'spiritual' aspect of

humanity is the divine or immortal essence possessed by all 'higher' forms of creation - human and angelic. Just as Lucifer is referred to, or refers to himself as a "spirit" (ll. 100, 120), and the Eden spirits are described as "spirits" (ll. 235, 250), so too Adam refers to the "spirits" of Eve and himself (l. 991). Similarly Eve speaks of her "soul" (ll. 508, 1216, 1757, 1761), and refers to both her and Adam's "souls" (l. 961), while Adam refers to his own "soul" (ll. 1509, 1721), and to the "souls" of himself and Eve (l. 1928).

Finally, the structure of A Drama of Exile is an important indication of its purpose. It is written as a play, a form which renders the theme more immediate through its powerful dramatisation, while the dialogues reflect the speculative and exploratory nature of the philosophical subject.

The sequence of twenty-eight sonnets in the 1844 volume explore many of the relevant themes and preoccupations which characterise Elizabeth's earlier work, including the correspondence between human (poetic) artistry and divine creativity, the nature of the spiritual personality, and the Christian hope for bereaved lovers. The Soul 's Expression attempts to describe the intensity of the human soul's self-expression, which it describes as the "music" of the individual's inner nature (l. 3). It would seem from this that the soul's expression is the artistic or poetic aspect of the personality, implying that the soul's immortality would consist of an after-life experienced on a lofty plane of divine, spiritual or creative being. Moreover, that the soul's expression is interwoven "with dream and thought and feeling" (l. 4) suggests that the 'soulful' aspect of the individual is inter-related with all intellectual, imaginative, intuitive and sensitive activity. The soul is, therefore, everything in Man which is not physical or motivated by physical impulses. It attempts to manifest

itself through ultimate creative and mental activity. However, if it were to succeed in expressing itself in this 'ultimate' sense, the poet suggests that the result would be death:

> But if I did it, - as the thunder-roll
> Breaks its own cloud, my flesh would perish there (ll. 12-13).

The simile is a powerful one in its choice of extreme natural occurrences (thunder-storms) to express a sense of human physical death, and the image serves also to stress the inter-relationship between Man and his natural world: all are in the hand of God. This notion, however, is not merely a way of describing the ultimate intensity of soulfulness, but an assertion of the inability of the soul to fully realise itself without the destruction of the mortal aspect of the individual, the physical body, which releases the soul into the spiritual world which is its natural habitation. The implication is, moreover, that after the soul has experienced the highest pitch of its expression in this life, death remains the only phenomenon which can follow it, either because such an ultimate experience of soulful expression is too traumatic for the physical form to sustain, or because, after such an experience, death alone remains the sole activity of greater magnitude and significance which the individual has left to him or her to undergo (1). It is interesting to compare the themes of The Soul's Expression and Keats' Ode to a Nightingale, in this respect. Here, Keats seems to suggest that the poet's aesthetic apprehension of the nightingale's song has become a significantly intense experience of the soul which, while the poet lives, cannot be equalled, and will fade. Indeed, for Keats that moment of intensity can only be eclipsed by the experience of the traumatic moment when death itself strikes. This is one of several of Elizabeth's poems which seem to bear similarities to Keats' work, either in thematic, philosophical or symbolic terms.

Other sonnets in the sequence concerned with this theme include

The Seraph and Poet, which considers the parallelism between the seraph, who sings to God in Heaven (ll. 1-5), and the poet, who "sings upon the earth grave-riven" (l. 6). Again, On a Portrait of Wordsworth by B. R. Haydon (2) also speaks of the spiritual nature of the artist's role, and it refers to the artist's:

> ... rightful place as poet-priest
> By the high altar, singing prayer and prayer
> To the higher Heavens (ll. 9-11).

These lines are adulatory indeed of Wordsworth's artistry, but they are as much an expression of Elizabeth's belief in the divine function of the artist as a creator, as of her deep admiration for Wordsworth.

In a similar vein, the unit of two sonnets dedicated to George Sand (3) concern the spiritual qualities of this individual artist. In To George Sand, a Desire, we find the strength of the novelist's 'soul' asserted in terms of its resistance to being engulfed by the extraordinary powers of her intellect and by the intensity of her feelings, her "tumultuous senses" (ll. 2-4), in the way that spirits can balance or equalise, or prove to be as valuable as human intellectual activity. The idea is thus conveyed of the balance within the human individual of mental intellect and spiritual feeling. To George Sand, A Recognition describes the artist's creative intensity in a manner which recalls The Soul's Expression. George Sand "burnest in a poet-fire" (l. 10). The sonnet also describes the interesting notion of the androgynous nature of surviving spiritual entities:

> Till God unsex thee on the heavenly shore
> Where unincarnate spirits purely aspire! (ll. 13-14)(4).

Finally, Insufficiency describes how, at moments of intense creativity, the poet's soul yearns to be free of her body (ll. 1-4). However, she provides her own exhortation:

Wait, soul, until thine ashen garments fall.
And then resume thy broken strains, and seek
Fit peroration without let or thrall (ll. 12-14).

The final two lines of this sonnet appear, as before, to suggest that the soul is the creative faculty, and that the immortal state marks a progression towards a spiritual plane the essence of which is aesthetic and creative. Here, the poet's soul will be able to realise fully the artistic personality which he or she possesses, in an atmosphere of heightened perception, sensitivity and creative energy.

Many of the sonnets deal with the anguish of bereavement and the hopeful prospect of immortality. In Grief the poet rejects the superficiality of hysterical grief (l. 1), asserting that it is better to express grief for one's dead "in silence like to Death" (l. 9), and to keep faith by quietly remembering the loved one until it is one's own turn to die. (ll. 10-12). Tears, too, has a message of hopefulness, while Substitution, moving from the lover's ominous silence (ll. 1-2), which is probably due to his death, asserts that only the voice of Christ can compensate the bereaved lover (l. 14). Again, Futurity offers hope in the knowledge that the deceased lover is surviving and awaits reunion which will follow the death of the lover still alive (ll. 8-14). Exaggeration asserts that human grief is sanctified by Christ's experience of it, and The Two Sayings, though not specifically concerned with bereavement, offer hope to those who are "heart-deep in salt tears" (l. 4).

Following these, the Peter sequence, The Look and The Meaning of the Look comprises two poems similarly hopeful in their implications of divine forgiveness, while in The Prisoner the only light for the captive - be it a painful assurance in view of his confinement - lies in his contemplation of Heaven, and of the natural world - though both seem remote from him (ll. 4-6, 11-14).

The Sonnets convey an impression of the inevitability of death, and simultaneously exhort the reader to regard Christ as the only refuge. Irreparableness states that the poet's death is as inevitable as that of the flowers which she has plucked (ll. 13-14), while Past and Future concerns the poet's looking to her future in Christ (ll. 13-14). A Thought for a Lonely Death-Bed is a morbid poem saved only by the positivism of its argument, in which the individual who is dying in loneliness is urged to turn to God. Work and Contemplation propounds a simple creed of the ideal life as a process of labour, spiritual devotion and praise (ll. 12-14), and in a similar vein Work conveys the idea of the purpose of life being to follow God through a life of endurance and experience until "Death's mild curfew shall from work assoil" (l. 4), the individual being assured throughout of God's constant presence and support. Again, Cheerfulness Taught by Reason urges hope in the future as the only positive way of avoiding despair at:

> ...eternity's constraint
> Round our aspirant souls (ll. 5-6).

Life, the poem asserts, is but a short journey towards God (l. 14). Finally, Perplexed Music describes the mortal's inability to understand the enigma which is human experience, but declares that the angels have an omniscient comprehension of human life (ll. 11-14). The sonnet implies, therefore, that to enter the spiritual after-life means to attain the transcendent vision of total knowledge and understanding.

This notion recalls the words of St. Paul, who anticipated the dawn of complete comprehension which follows death: "Now we see only puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we shall see face to face. My knowledge now is partial; then it will be whole, like God's knowledge of me" (I Corinthians, XIII, vv. 12-13).

It is important to consider Elizabeth's use of the sonnet- form in this sequence, a genre traditionally used to propound a single idea, impression or theory in poetic form, as she strives to clarify her thinking with regard to spiritual matters and to convey an idea or belief through each sonnet. The sequence, apart from considering themes which have already been raised in her work, introduces the notion of the purely spiritual nature of the after-life which transcends distinctions of gender, and the idea of the importance of work and positive activity in human-life. The latter concept, which appears more healthy and affirmative than some of the earlier poetry with its mood of languorous negativity, seems to derive some influence from contemporary notions of utilitarianism and positivism.

Many of the longer poems in the 1844 volume continue to explore the role of the poet and of art within the context of death, as raised in some of the sonnets. For example The Poet and the Bird asserts that poetry is as much a part of creation and the natural world as the song of a nightingale. The poet's song is of divine subjects (l. 2). However, it is rejected by his community (ll. 1-2), who are only able to appreciate the sensuous song of the nightingale (ll. 3-4). Nevertheless, God (whom the bird describes as "the heavenly poet", l. 7) is the essence of all creativity (l. 8). Ironically, when both poet and bird are dead, it is the poet's song which is remembered on earth, and not that of the nightingale (ll. 11-12), because the songs of nightingales are less differentiated and are uncharacterised by the subtleties of uniqueness and individuality which are the mark of each human poet,

and which are appreciated by society in retrospect. The poem implies that a poet's artistic creativity corresponds to the cosmic creativity of God. When the human poet dies, he himself, along with the rest of creation, return to this cosmic power-force, and the poet's work meanwhile survives in the recognition given to him on earth after death. The poem is interesting both for its suggestion, again, of a scheme which nears a 'world-soul' concept (that is, both poet and nightingale are absorbed into the all-unifying presence of "the heavenly poet") and for its introduction of the Romantic image of the nightingale (found in Keats' Ode and in Coleridge's The Nightingale).

The Dead Pan, too, asserts that "God Himself is the best Poet" (l. 248), while A Lay of the Early Rose praises the poetic vocation and asserts that poets should not seek earthly praise when they are:

> Heaven-chosen to inherit
> The high-throne of a chief spirit! (ll. 175-76).

Moreover, the importance of the poetic destiny in heaven is intensified by the assertion that death "breaks the chain" (l. 206) - that is, it terminates all that we can know in an immediate sense, therefore leaving us with nothing unless one believes in the reality of a spiritual existence.

The poem which most extensively considers the divine role of the poet as creator in this volume, is probably A Vision of Poets. Again, the central figure is a poet who learns from the lady that death, when accepted peacefully as an entry into heaven, is sweet and an inspiration for respectful memorials (ll. 88-96). When he drinks from the fourth pool, that which symbolises the cruelty of life, his experience is of a swoon which places him between Life and Death:

And spiritual thunders, born of soul
Not cloud, did leap from mystic pole
And o'er him roll and counter-roll,

Crushing their echoes reboant
With their own wheels. Did Heaven so grant
His spirit a sign of covenant?
At last came silence (ll. 193-99).

These are powerful lines expressing the tempestuous nature of the poet's vision, and they convey too a sense of the fiery intensity characteristic of spiritual activity already noted in previous poems.

In A Vision of Poets death is seen as a total severance from this life: its traumatic nature puts "pause to life and rhetoric" (l. 381). However, "Life is perfected by Death" (l. 930). This is so because, although Death marks the end of life, it marks the beginning of a new life:

... Let the bloom
Of Life grow over, undenied,
This bridge of Death, which is not wide -
I shall be soon at the other side (ll. 960-963).

When the poet is granted a vision of all the major poets living in eternal bliss (ll. 271-420), he sees also that they "looked wonderful with life and death" (ll. 422-3) which, again, suggests that in death there is a new form of life which instils the disembodied personality with a sense of transcendent bliss. The importance of the poets' role lies in that they have "died for Beauty" in a similar way that religious martyrs die for spiritual Truth (ll. 290-91). The suggestion here seems to be not that the poetic vocation involves the poet's physical death at the hands of a hostile society, but rather

that Beauty is as ultimately important to the poet as spiritual truth is to the martyr, that those who die as 'poets' may be viewed as being as inextricably related to Beauty as martyrs are to 'Truth' and, possibly, that the poet's role is a spiritual one in that both poets and martyrs are witnesses to Divine values. There may also be a suggestion of society's rejection of the poet and of Art in the way that pagan communities reject religious truth, refusing to accept the creeds of those whom they martyr. Again, it is even possible that the poet, whose criteria are 'spiritual', is unable to accept the tenets of a materialistic society. Therefore his death marks a return to his true 'home', his God, in the way that the deaths of martyrs signify a departure from an unsympathetic world, and a return to their true 'home', the Kingdom of God.

The immortal ecstacy of the poets in the narrator's vision is directly attributed to their state of eternal being with the Divine, who is referred to as the "Poet-God" (l. 816), and who is "the chief Poet" (l. 895). When the poet, too, dies, he also attains immortal bliss in complete harmony with this 'God-Poet' (ll. 995-97). Meanwhile, again, he also attains immortality on this earth as God's prophet "of the Beautiful" (l. 292): children attend his funeral (ll. 851-930), and:

> ... his songs in troops
> Walk up and down our earthly slopes (ll. 997-98).

This image appears too physical to be a competent expression of the poet's meaning - that the dead artist's works survive in <u>this</u> world in a very real sense, although it does convey a sense of these works' constant presence with us in a spiritual significance: they are as 'alive', as near, as if they were people literally treading the face of this earth.

The creative poet, therefore, is assured dual-immortality in terms of earthly fame and of his unification with the Divine creator. It should be noted, again, however, that the poets whom he saw in vision had each retained their individual status and personality, which would appear to counter-balance the implications noted elsewhere of Elizabeth's belief in a nebulous 'world-soul'. As for the term "soul", it is introduced into the poem with a variety of shades of meaning and significance, sometimes implying the inner consciousness (l. 2), the intuitive sense (l. 730), the inner being (l. 44), the whole inner nature or self (l. 910), spiritual essence (l. 764), or transcendent, creative being (ll. 696, and 383 with regard to Goethe). 'Soul' would therefore seem to infer the inner, spiritual self which is able to imply manifest itself in a variety of ways and spheres of activity. As far as other spiritual terminology is concerned, while "angel" is generally introduced in a purely 'mythological' sense (ll. 31, 251, 416, 683), "spirit" generally implies the active, spiritual vitality of the individual (ll. 19, 102, 686), the intuitiveness (l. 781) or, occasionally, to convey a sense of the upsurging optimism, inner buoyancy (l. 781).

To emphasise the importance of death in the poem's metaphysical scheme, the concept of the grave is introduced as an embodiment of that element in the poem (ll. 66, 78, 822), as is the image of Keats' shroud (l. 82), and of the tomb (l. 988). In this vein the poet frequently uses death in a metaphysical or symbolic sense, again bringing before the reader's attention the importance of death in the poet's vision. In this sense the four pools are described as being "blank as death" (l. 126), and the "dead tree" beside the first pool (l. 128) is described as having been struck by lightning during a thunderstorm, and "fixed in the spectral strain" (l. 131) which

convulsed it at that time.

In addition the poet frequently constructs interesting compound words such as "spirit-kiss" (l. 16), and "spirit-blast" (l. 676), to augment the spiritual atmosphere of the transcendent vision described. These terms, and others like them, are characteristic of this phase of Elizabeth's poetic career, indicative of the drift of her thoughts - but also of the time before she become sensitive as to how such a reference of hers to a "spirit-kiss" might be construed in the context of her known interest in Spiritualism.

The other poem in the volume concerned with the theme of the death of poets is L.E.L's Last Question, again referring to Letitia Elizabeth Landon (see Chapter Four, Note Nine). The poem is written in the context of the poetess's bizarre death resulting from prussic-acid poisoning. Her last question had related, it would seem, to whether or not she was thought of, and Elizabeth's poem concerns the human need to be held in the regard of others, to be thought well of, to be loved. These feelings appear especially poignant in view of Miss Landon's probable death at the hands of her husband's mistress, but purely in terms of the poem itself this common need is intensified by the element of mortality which divides us from those whom we have omitted to love and from those whom we wish to love us. Once more it is tempting to consider the poem's argument in this respect in the light of Elizabeth's feelings of guilt regarding her brother's death. The final piquant thrust of the poem is that the need to be thought of is experienced by God himself, who created Man from His need to be worshipped (ll. 60-63), and, more important, who considers mankind in the totally committed sense that Miss Landon evidently yearned for at the time of her death. In addition, the fact that the need to be thought of is experienced by God and humanity alike is perhaps a

further indication of their possessing the same, essential spiritual nature. The pathos of Miss Landon's desire for love is heightened by the poet's reiteration of the element of death: while Miss London is soon to be "in darksome death" (l. 42), lain in her "sepulchre" (l. 49), the stars in heaven "see us die" (l. 59), for we shall all lie in our "graves" (l. 55). In the same way God Himself "tasted death" (l. 61), "By death and life and love appealing" (l. 62). This is a sentimental poem, although its subject is moving both for its universality and for the reiteration of the poignant inevitability of death which the poet makes throughout the work.

It remains evident throughout this volume that Elizabeth continued in uncertainty as to the value of human love within the context of death. The fact that she presents contradictory poems on the subject could, perhaps, be construed as indicative of her uncertainty: in A Vision of Poets, the third pool which the poet drinks is symbolic of "the unsatisfying love of the world" (Complete Works, II, note p. 385), and in the same way That Day laments the fallibility of human love. Loved Once, while asserting that both God and Christ embrace all with a boundless love, state that human individuals are too cruel in the fickleness of their own affections for others:

> Could ye 'We loved her once'
> Say cold of me when further put away
> In earth's sepulchral clay,
> When mute the lips which deprecate today?
> Not so! not then - least then! When life is shriven
> And death's full joy is given, -
> Of those who sit and love you up in heaven
> Say not 'We loved them once' (ll. 41-48).

However, the poem is in fact less concerned with despairing about lost love, than with positively pleading for humanity to love others with greater conviction and ardour, in view of the short duration which human life has. It is not sufficient to remember those who have died, thereby immortalising them, but it is, the poet suggests, essential for them to be loved, and for them to love in return, as long as this life continues:

> God is too near above, the grave beneath,
> And all our moments breathe
> Too quick in mysteries of life and death (ll. 50-52).

The Mourning Mother, which Gardner B. Taplin declares "now seems among the most mawkish of Elizabeth's poems" (Taplin, p. 129), is certainly decidedly morbid in theme, concerning a Mother's grief at the death of her blind son. However, the poet asserts that the child is with God:

> Into the sudden glory,
> Out of the dark he trod,
> Departing from before thee
> At once to light and God! (ll. 6-49).

These sentimental lines express the hopeful belief on the part of the poet that to die means not to be extinguished for eternity, but rather to move from the 'dark' of this life to the 'light' of spiritual immortality. However, heaven is depicted in conventional, sentimental terms, as an idealised landscape populated by singing angels (ll. 52-61). The importance of the poem, however, lies in its hopeful message to the bereaved mother of a reunion in heaven with her loved one, although this idea is expressed, again, in highly sentimental terms:

Until ye two have meeting
Where Heaven's pearl-gate is,
And he shall lead they feet in
As once thou leddest his (ll. 78-81).

As before, it is in the sense of two human personalities who will meet and recognise each other that this concept of the after-life is presented, not in terms of both being absorbed into a vast cosmic force. In A Valediction the full intensity of human love is portrayed. The poet's love is "strong as death" (l. 37), and, should the lover die, then the only course for the poet would be to die also (ll. 42-43). However, this notion is introduced more as an indication of the intensity of the love discussed, than as a means of exploring the problems of bereavement, and the poem has little to say concerning the consolation of the mourning poet should her lover indeed die. Nevertheless, the constant introduction of God throughout the poem suggests a religious framework to the poet's love which implies that a Christian solution would apply if the poet's lover were to die, and the similarity between the first and last lines of each stanza suggests a ballad-structure which is appropriate in view of the theme of passionate love, heightening the poet's intensity of feeling through the compression of the ballad-form with its concentration of emotion.

The House of Clouds, a description of the poet-lover's elevation of her thought-life, is a re-affirmation of the value of true love: at the end of the poem, she rejects the idea of raising the value of philosophizing, in view of the fact that "Love secures some fairer things" (l. 99). This is because Love is in some way "immortal" (l. 100). The prize of great value which Love secures is not, therefore, any facet of the meditative consciousness - any idea, thought or concept - but, rather, the object of the poet's love (l. 104).

Several of the longer narrative poems in the volume deal with the subject of Love and Death, including The Lay of the Brown Rosary which concerns Onora, who, on being summoned to die, rejects God's call in order to remain with her lover. We learn that this is so because "Love feareth death"(l. 168). Onora's resultant severance from God culminates in her curse of Him and her communion with the spirit of the evil nun. Subsequently her lover dies at the wedding (l. 328). Onora, stricken with repentance, revokes her curse of God (ll. 352-4), and dies herself (l. 398). The poem implies that human love cannot over-ride the ultimate purposes of God, and that it is futile to cling perversely to worldly affections when the individual is required to adopt a position of total resignation to the Supreme Will. The poem adds to the impression of the ultimate significance of Death which it creates, by introducing many individual deaths: apart from Onora and her lover, the nun who was buried alive (ll. 46-50), the abbess, and Onora's father (l. 92), have also passed from this world. The second part of the poem is interesting for its form. Here we find the use of dialogue throughout the section, with the angels and the evil spirit, and Onora's somnambulistic reflections. The effect is both to accentuate the possibility of the reality of spiritual entities (on the same level as the central character herself), to suggest a close inter-relationship between the spiritual world and this one, and to imply that the spiritual quality of mankind is in some sense the sub-consciousness or subliminal mind, which is what is expressing itself through Onora as she sleeps, directly conversing with the disembodied spirits, and through a means - her voice - which is identical to their's.

Lady Geraldine's Courtship is a celebration of human love, in which the intensity of the poor poet's love is in some sense related

to the aestheticism of his vocation. The poet asserts that human invention and exploration are not the result of "spirit-power" (the latter another of the compound-words characteristic of Elizabeth's work at this period), and therefore have little influence upon life and death:

> If we trod the deeps of ocean, if we struck the stars in rising,
> If we wrapped the globe intensely with one hot electric breath,
> 'Twere but power within our tether, no new spirit-power comprising,
> And in life we were not greater men, nor bolder men in death
> (ll. 209-12).

These are powerful lines, the strength of which lies in the compactness of their expression, a feature which counter-balances the verbosity elsewhere in Elizabeth's poetry. In particular the line describing the wrapping of the earth "intensely with one hot electric breath" is a vivid passage conveying a sense of the energy, the vitality involved in such an invention, as well as a notion of the exciting possibilities which it would open.

Death is regarded as an important levelling factor in Lady Geraldine's Courtship, suggesting that all are equal when death strikes (ll. 293-4). Angels appear frequently in the imagery of the poem: the poet describes Lady Geraldine as looking "like an angel clad in wings" (l. 20), deplores the human fault of self-admiration which drives out all thoughts of whether "angels will commend us at the goal of pilgrimage" (l. 204), and describes how, in his distracted state after thinking that Lady Geraldine had rejected him, he:

> ... saw the skies grow ruddy
> With the deepening feet of angels, and I knew what spirits can
> (ll. 271-72)

Although the term 'angel' is introduced more commonly in a symbolic significance, therefore, the notion of the 'spirit' is given a more literal meaning. Usually it suggests the integrity, the fiery nature of the inner self, as when the poet refers to "true spirits" (l. 280) as distinct from wordly ones, to "spirits pure and ardent" (l. 287) who reject "Social fictions" (l. 285), and to Lady Geraldine's "lovely Spirit face" (l. 306), an intimation of the inner strength and integrity which shines through her. In contrast to these images of inner nobility and power, the reference to the "soul-wings" budding from the poet's brain - an expression of his distraction following his apparent rejection by Lady Geraldine - appears gross and absurd. One interesting image in the poem relating to the subject of death, is the symbol of the suicidal horse (ll. 346-48), which recalls the death-horse image of A Drama of Exile.

The Rhyme of the Duchess May explores the idea of the supreme importance of Love: in a sense, the Duchess May and Sir Guy die for love, taking their own lives in order to avoid death at the hands of those who resent this love and desire to avenge May's rejection of Lord Leigh. The poem asserts that death is essentially a levelling factor, for all must die, both Maud, the child who died in 1843, aged three years, and the medieval lovers May and Sir Guy (ll. 427-8). Indeed, the poem states that: "All our life is mixed with death" (l. 443). However, the poem offers a message of hope too: dying means progressing to God (l. 380), and all ends in His peace:

> And I smiled to think God's greatness flowed around our incompleteness
> Round our restlessness, His rest (ll. 447-48).

The image of the presence of God 'flowing' around human inadequacy conveys an impression of the security of that presence, while it also creates a picture of the magnitude of God's greatness, which

engulfs humanity as the mighty ocean surrounds small islands.

With regard to the poem's notion of spiritual entities, the narrator suggests the existence of spirits who help to sustain mortal hope. In view of both violent death (the suicides of May and Sir Guy), and 'natural' death (the passing of the child Maud) the poet wonders if the lovers were comforted by guardian angels as they plunged towards their deaths (ll. 417-20). This idea may well have a dual significance: possibly one is to consider whether - as many spiritualists believed - visitants from transcendent spheres literally do come to those in this world who have to face tragedy and suffering, or death itself, to sustain and uphold them. Alternatively the implication may be that the dead lovers are being requested by the poet, who addresses them as "spirits" (l. 417), to return, themselves, to bear witness to the fact of after-life, as other spirits supported them when they, too, were dying. The deathly theme of the poem is asserted throughout by the repetitive ballad-like use of the funereal"Toll slowly" line which occurs in each stanza, and by the imagery. The first six stanzas of the poem describe the graveyard where the poet is sitting when his thoughts turn to the old story of the Duchess: there are other references in the poem to death (ll. 76, 103, 400), while others to the grave reiterate the deathly atmosphere of the theme (ll. 83, 143, 203). As the Duchess plunges to her death, significantly she clings to Sir Guy:

> as one, withstood, clasps a Christ upon the rood,
> In a spasm of deathly pain (ll. 365-66).

The irony of this rather extreme simile lies in the implication that a closer adherance to Christian values could have avoided the tragedies which occurred in the story.

This poem introduces another interesting compound-word: "spirit-laden weight", again characteristic of the poet's style at this time. It should also be noted that the structure of the poem,

a recollected ballad beginning at stanza VII, implies the idea of an argument being propounded in retrospect, possibly with a didactic aim in mind - specifically, of the poet's thinking concerning the subject of love and death.

Catarina to Camoens is the song of the dying Catarina to her lover, abroad at the time of her passing (5). As death approaches her (ll. 4, 21, 26) she becomes increasingly aware of its significance as the time when the soul leaves the body (ll. 49-50). Physical death, however, is a severance in which loving eyes and sighs are lost for ever (ll. 63, 70). Love, tragically, is destroyed by death: "Death forerunneth Love to win". (l. 71). The soul will "pass away" (l. 115), but the "spirit" is transcendent and hears in an imaginative, recollected sense the lover's song of praise, above merely terrestrial sounds (l. 111). However, the hope which the poem offers is sentimental: Catarina's eyes will "lean" out from heaven to lovingly observe the surviving Camoens (l. 127). Similarly, the poem's concept of spiritual identity is sentimental and disapointing: the spirit of Catarina, far from being elevated to some supreme state of being, appears to retain human pettiness, to the extent of being jealous should Camoens' eyes ever turn towards those of another woman (l. 147-52). Such a feeling on the part of Catarina no doubt conveys something of the all-consuming love which she bears for Camoens, but as the sentiment of a soul in paradise, her possessive jealosy is unacceptable, unworthy. On the other hand, the idea of Catarina jealously looking down from heaven provides an amusing variation of the repeated final line of the last stanza, and the notion may well be a refreshing indication that the spirits of the dead retain a sense of humour. In the final event, however, the notion seems, nevertheless, grotesquely at variance with the tragic theme.

Again the poet introduces an unusual compound-word in the term "spirit-shriven" (l. 85), while the ballad-structure,

with the repeated final line of each stanza, besides stressing the love-theme, conveys a sense of unity - the unity of a completed argument or of the poet's attempt to convey in an objectified sense her thinking upon the themes of love and death.

A more cynical poem concerning this theme is Bertha in the Lane. Gardner B. Taplin describes it as "a sentimental treatment of the subject of death" (Taplin, p. 128). The importance of the poem for present purposes lies in its dark concept of human love, which in this case is betrayed, and causes death. The poet's lover jilts her and weds her sister. Referring to those who "die young" (l. 165), the poet traces her fate as a rejected lover, exploring it in a series of images drawn from the subject of death. Because she was rejected, the poet"had died" (l. 166); her sister's wedding dress is her "shroud" (l. 198); the poet will now enter "the grave" (l. 209); she declares that she must not be mourned (l. 211); she will wear a shroud (l. 213). However, the rather contrived nature of the death imagery assumes more serious proportions when it is realised that the poet is, after all, speaking of her literal death from a broken-heart, not simply an emotional 'death' through her lover's desertion. She speaks of being smiled upon by her mother (l. 227), whom we have already learned is dead (l. 33). However, although the concept of Heaven suggested by the poem is conventional (the dead are enshrined in "molten glory", l. 45) the important fact remains that here the dead are believed to retain individual personalities. It is to her mother as an individual that the poet appeals (l. 36 following). Moreover, the poet implies that, through her sufferings, she does attain an inner strength and integrity, becoming "death-strong" in her soul (l. 228), and this spiritual strength fortifies her as, casting aside the fickleness of this world, she sees Christ as her only solution (stanza XXXIV). With a prayer to Him for her loving nature to be

cleansed of its selfishness, she sees herself dying in a purgatorial ecstasy of emotional pain, but of spiritual release:

Wind my thread of life up higher,
Up, through angels' hands of fire!
I aspire while I expire (ll. 236-38).

These lines, however, fail to contain the fiery nature of the poet's meaning. The image of God winding the thread of her life towards Himself is effective, and 'Metaphysical' in style, but the notion of the angels' hands is too physical for the spiritual nature of what is being expressed, while the final line (l. 238) is weak.

Throughout the 1844 volume, Elizabeth increasingly asserted the inevitability of death, stressing that, under its shadow, all are made equal. This is clear in poems such as Rhapsody of Life's Progress, where we read: "And death is so nigh us, life cools from its heat" (l. 69). In view of the inevitability of approaching death, the poem piquantly describes the desperate longing of Man to commune with disembodied spirits who would thereby prove the reality of the spirit-life:

And through the dim rolling we hear the sweet calling
Of spirits that speak in a soft under-tongue
The sense of the mystical march:
And we cry to them softly 'Come nearer, come nearer,
And life up the lap of this dark, and speak clearer,
And teach us the song that ye sung! (ll. 101-106).

These lines, while asserting in very human terms the nature of the spiritual-world (that is, the spirits 'call' and 'speak'), convey a refreshing sense of its peace and quietude too. They also imply the nearness of that world to this earthly experience, and suggest that the'spirits' therein are interested in human affairs. The notion of

spirits being able to "lift up" the darkness that 'laps' around our earthy life, is a reassuring indication of the transcendent perception granted to those in the spiritual life: they are able to view our existence from a stand-point of omniscience, and see clearly the ultimate hope the truth beyond the darkness which is all that we ourselves have immediate perception of.

The poem is hopeful too in that, like many preceding poems, it offers a dual-immortality. In the terms of this world, human idealism ensures immortality (ll. 151-59), although, even "the shroud should be donned" (l. 157), while when death comes and the body perishes, the soul, the spirit, survives (ll. 161-76).

In the same mood, Crowned and Wedded, a poem describing the marriage of the young Queen Victoria in 1840, contains a long section describing the dead in Westminster Abbey (ll. 19-28). The passage asserts that death comes to all, and the royal and the great are not immune to its levelling power. The following poem, Crowned and Buried, relates to this theme. Its concern is the dead warrior Napoleon, and it asserts the discrepancy between the life of a great and powerful ruler, and his death. Again, none can escape the destruction of death: apart from those who die in modern warfare (ll. 71, 74), the poem cites those in "pyramidal Nilotic tombs" (ll. 25-26). The French request for the return of Napoleon's ashes (ll. 89-94), is an occasion for England's desire to 'bury' old enmities along with them, too. For, though the poem is lucid in its description of Napoleon's ashes, his body, his grave (ll. 114, 116, 131-132, 142-43, 162, 166-67), it is primarily concerned with the theme of the great man who cannot be admired. Since the tyrannical despot, Napoleon, left nothing good behind him in this world to ensure his immortality, the poem turns to speculation about his spiritual-life. Suggesting that his state as

a deceased great one may be nobler than that of a crowned tyrant, the poet asserts that only those now able to observe his spiritual existence - that is, other spirits - are in a position to judge (ll. 167-68). This poem, then, concerns the possibility for those who, unlike many of the other notable patriots, artists and politicians in her previous poems, can lay slight claim to being remembered in this world for their moral example, value and worth.

The 1844 volume also includes a number of poems which relate the theme of death to that of childhood. As one might expect, these are sometimes sentimental, among them A Child Asleep, which describes spirits and angels in conventionally childish and sentimental terms (ll. 21, 29, 36, 118, 151). The reader discovers that the sleeping child has in fact died (ll. 41-50), and is sentimentally lulled by angels' voices. However, the value of the poem from the point of view of present purposes lies in its concept of death as the state of complete union with God (l. 49), in an atmosphere of total peace which is akin to sleep. This idea relates back to the theme of The Sleep in the 1838 volume, and offers a concept of death different from that seen in other poems, where the spiritual state is one of heightened intensity and power rather than of sublime quietude and repose. Sleeping and Watching is also sentimental, addressed to a sleeping baby by the poet as she approaches death (ll. 33-52). Here again, however, death is peaceful, like sleep. The closing lines of the poem are like a conceit (ll. 49-52). Playing with the idea of sleeping and awakening, the poet considers the baby's waking to behold her, in parallelism to the poet's death, when she will be 'awoken' by an angel. This 'conceit' has the effect not only of suggesting that death is a form of awaking to a new condition of life, but also of implying that this life, from which we die, is like a dream from which, through dying, we awake

to higher consciousness.

The Cry of the Children is less sentimental because its concern with the horrors of child-labour reveals an intense social awareness upon Elizabeth's part that the other poems about children lack (for example, stanza VII of The Cry of the Children). The cry of the child workers is against death and suffering, and the poem includes numerous references to the graves which the children will eventually inhabit (ll. 32, 36, 45, 56) as well as citing the pitiful example of one child, Alice, who has in fact died (ll. 39-40). The poem looks towards God to heal the wounds of the children exploited by industrial society, but, perhaps inevitably, this aspect of the poem does lapse into sentimentality: we read of "the children's souls which God is calling sunward" (l. 99). The Fourfold Aspect, addressed to a child, describes his increasing awareness of death, from a small child untroubled by the thought of dying (ll. 21-4, 30), to the later child who, through a classical education, learns that death implies the immortality of the heroic (ll. 56-62) as the young Elizabeth Barrett had indeed asserted in The Battle of Marathon. Dawning awareness of the reality of death fills the child with terror and despair as he wonders if Christ does provide an answer (ll. 63-102). Finally, the poet urges the child to have faith (ll. 103-34), to believe in "the throne above the spheres" (ll. 112). In a poem which implies a Second Coming and the rising of the dead (l. 23), the poet urges a life of work, hope, love and trust, in which the individual should look to Christ as the provider of the answer to death.

One poem which contains a vision of heaven is The Lost Bower. Here Heaven is described in traditional terms as a Utopia populated by white-robed angels, where God is enthroned (ll. 365-70). The poem contains a number of references to other supernatural and mythological beings, including fairies (l. 166), a dryad (l. 162), naiad (l. 180),

and fay or faunus (l. 359). The term "angel" is introduced in one simile here for its qualities of being "out of sight yet blessing well" (l. 145). The term 'spirit' is introduced with a variety of significances, sometimes defining the human individual's quality of transcendent dreaming or vision (l. 273), the inner sense of purpose which expresses itself through out-going emotional impulses (l. 319), the prayerful 'religious' awareness (l. 363). It is also introduced in the context, again, of a simile, for its quality of 'hovering', as ivy 'hovers' around trees (l. 98). The term "soul" is introduced less frequently, and normally to define the aspirant visionary quality of the inner being (for example, ll. 293-5). Here, again, the poet constructs relevant compound words such as "spirit- ruth" (l. 204), and "spirit-vigour" (l. 293).

Of the remaining poems in the 1844 volume, most reveal a preoccupation with death. The Romaunt of the Page comprises a catalogue of deaths - the deaths of the page's mother (l. 35), the Lady Abbess (l. 79), the Knight's father (ll. 120-4), the Knights father's slanderer (ll. 139-40), the Earl Walter (l. 151), and his wife (l. 180). The Knight has married Walter's daughter, but she is now disguised as the Knight's page (stanza XXXVI). Finally she, too, is slain by the Knight's Paynim pursuers (stanzas XLII - XLII). In the midst of all this death and slaughter, however, the poem offers a glint of certainty in its reference to:

> the spirit-light between
> The darks of life and death (ll. 328-29),

which suggests that the spiritual life is an illumination of the mysterious confusions of life, as well as of the sombre blackness of death. For the poem presents a dark concept of life in its portrayal

of knightly violence, while death, too, is dark because of the uncertainty of what lies beyond it. The "spirit-light" referred to is, perhaps, the soul's vision of its own immortality, a vision which 'sheds light' upon this darkness and uncertainty. A Flower in a Letter reflects the general preoccupation of the volume with death, in its inclusion of funeral flowers within the listed references to other varieties of flora (ll. 43-48). The Cry of the Human is also concerned with death, which it sees as the traumatic experience when visual powers fade, death encroaches and, bereft even of the energy to pray, the dying individual expires into being with God:

> And soon all vision waxeth dull;
> Men whisper 'He is dying';
> We cry no more 'Be pitiful!'
> We have no strength for crying:
> No strength, no need. Then, soul of mine,
> Look up and triumph rather!
> Lo, in the depth of God's Divine,
> The Son adjures the Father (ll. 118-25).

This intimate scrutiny of the last moments of a dying individual are certainly at variance with modern taste and aesthetic expectations. Yet is has to be acknowledged that these lines are an attempt to express concisely a genuine and universal human experience, and to offer some positive reassurance to the reader who may be appalled by the prospect of physical death. We may be repelled by the morbid description of the stages through which the dying must pass, but it is still possible to respond to the positive optimism of the poet's faith placed in the life to come.

The poem stresses the universality of death in its references to

"wayside graves" (l. 6) beside which people mourn, to "corpses", the victims of a plague piled in a "dead-cart" (ll. 30-31), and the death-bed (ll. 73-74). The references to angels and seraphs (ll. 51, 61) are less relevant to the poet's thinking with regard to spiritual entities than those to "spirits" (ll. 15, 106), a term usually used to distinguish the immortal aspect of the individual from the mortal physical body, as in the reference to "Clay" and "spirit" (l. 26), and "corpse" and "spirit" (ll. 95-96). Finally, the reference to "Death's White Horses" (l. 49) is another echo of the image of the death-steed in A Drama of Exile, while the repetitive line at the end of each stanza gives the impression of the poem less as a ballad in this instance, but as a prayer-sequence which, in a sense, indeed it is.

To conclude, therefore, Poems (1844) is a significant volume from Elizabeth's pen, the first to emerge following the death of her beloved brother, an event which, as has been stated, may well provide the key to Elizabeth's great interest in Spiritualism. The poems in the volume therefore express an inevitably stronger obsession with the subject of death on the part of the poet, while at the same time offering an encouragingly optimistic consolation in their increasing tendency to seek a Christian solution to the problems of grief and bereavement, as opposed to abandoning the mourner to total despair. Despite frequent lapses into morbid sentimentality, the volume expresses with increasing conviction those preoccupations which had been raised in preceding volumes: again, the poet is seen as standing in a unique relationship to God as a creator and as being able, through Art, to give voice to the immortal element, the essence of the surviving spirit which is in each individual. Though still uncertain as to the precise nature of the spiritual existence, after death, the reality of that existence itself is not questioned. At times the poet seems to suggest the existence of a 'world-soul' to which all are ultimately united,

while at other times she speaks of disembodied spirits who retain only too clearly the attributes of human beings of this world, sometimes to a grotesque and disappointing extent. In one poem, it seems even that the poet speaks of the spiritual life in terms of a transcendence of gender. It is likely that she was exploring many themes and ideas in her poetry, so that it would be inadvisable to regard any of these as definite aspects of her conclusions regarding spiritual issues. Finally, as before, death is seen as the one inevitability of life, a factor which stresses the ultimate equality of all mortal men and women.

Elizabeth's sonnet sequence, Sonnets from the Portuguese, was not published until 1850, when it appeared at the close of the second volume of the 1850 edition of her poems. However, since the present survey is to a large extent an attempt to trace a chronological development in Elizabeth's thinking, the sonnets are included at this point in the discussion because they were written during the period 1847-50. The sonnets were inspired by Elizabeth's love for Browning, whom she had first met in May 1845, and were written before their marriage in September 1846.

The title, 'Sonnets from the Portuguese', should not be taken to suggest a translation or, in fact, anything to do with Portugal. When the sonnets were to be published, Elizabeth and Browning chose the title, implying a translation, but in fact referring to an earlier love-poem of Elizabeth's, Catarina to Camoens, which did have a Portuguese setting. That poem, moreover, had moved Browning to name Elizabeth his "own little Portuguese", before he knew of the sonnets, so that the title Sonnets from the Portuguese for poems written by her to him, is indeed appropriate (Taplin, p. 234).

Since the central theme of Sonnets from the Portuguese is Love, one would expect the sequence to lack the former uncertainty about human love expressed in earlier poems. Indeed, the sonnets were without doubt the most optimistic of Elizabeth's poems to date, and even those which deal with the subject of death express confidence in the lovers' reunion in the after-life. The sonnets, in continuation with preceding works, are set within the hopeful Christian framework, and it is important to note that the presence of God is central to many of them, including Sonnets II, VI, X, XVII, XX, XXIV, XXV, XXVI, XXVII, XXVIII, XXX, XXXIII, XXXVI, XLII, XLIII.

God is regarded as the unifying factor between the two lovers:

> But only three in all God's universe
> Have heard this word thou hast said, - Himself, beside
> Thee speaking, and me listening! (Sonnet II, ll. 1-3).

Similarly, in Sonnet VI, the unity between God and the lovers, and the degree of involvement which the poet has in her lover, is stressed by the idea that God is made immediately aware of her lover when the poet herself approaches Him:

> ... and when I sue
> God for myself, He hears that name of thine,
> And sees within my eyes the tears of two (ll. 12-14).

God's word is omnipotent and cannot be defied (ll. 9-10). Therefore the poet is aware of her own and her lover's total dependence upon Him, as is asserted in Sonnet XXIV: "God only, who made us rich, can make us poor" (l. 14). The poet regards her lover as a gift from God (Sonnet XXVI, l. 14), while in Sonnet XX, God is used as an image to convey the sense of the unknown presence of the poet's lover: just as an atheist has no direct knowledge of the existence of God, who is

nevertheless (to the poet) a reality, so she, too, had no concept of her lover prior to their meeting, although he, too, existed (ll. 13-14).

On the other hand, throughout the sonnets the poet frequently appears to lay less stres upon the value of God, not to signify a rejection of her former religious faith in view of her newly-found romantic love, but in order to emphasise even more strongly the importance of her lover to her. Therefore, in Sonnet XXVII, we read that the poet, who "looked for only God" (l. 8), found "thee!" (that is, the lover), implying that the lover means more to her than her God. Again, in Sonnet XXXIX God appears to be almost as much an enemy to the lovers, as death itself: "Nor God's infliction, nor death's neighbourhood ... Nothing repels thee" (ll. 10, 13), while in Sonnet XXV God's grace is said to have seemed insufficient - before the poet met her lover (ll. 7-9).

This tendency to underplay the value of God to the poet now that she has found her lover should be taken, as has already been implied, as a rhetorical means of emphasising the lover's importance. The device is extended into those sonnets which concern the lover's future spiritual existence where, more often than otherwise, to be in some form of angelic union with the lover is seen as a less desirable state than unity with the lover on this earth. For example, in Sonnet XXII we find a picture of the lovers being together in Heaven. However, since they would then be required not to love each other in silence, but to participate in angelic singing (ll. 1-9), the poet says that it would be better for them both to remain on earth, where they are a unit of "pure spirits" (l. 12), removed in that unit from the "contrarious moods of men (l. 11), and islanded by "darkness and the death-hour" around them (l. 14). In passing one should note that the portrayal of the spiritual life is, again, sentimental and conventional: the lovers' souls are angelic

and characterised by huge, fiery wings. So too, in Sonnet XLII: "the white throne of God" is a conventional concept of the Divine sovereignty (l. 5).

Similarly, Heaven is renounced by the poet in Sonnet XXIII; she would rather:

... yield the grave for thy sake, and exchange
My near sweet view of Heaven, for earth with thee! (ll. 13-14)

and when she declares that her soul would be prepared to renounce "dreams of death" (l. 9), to live in this world with the lover, it is clearly the heavenly existence which she has in mind.

However, the sonnets do not suggest a new idea of the greater importance of human love against which God's love is seen to pale into insignificance: rather they are a celebration of the joys of human love in their own right, a celebration which by sometimes appearing to underplay Divine Love does so not in order to decry the Love of God, but to exalt the love between human individuals. The final note of the sequence is clear upon this point, for we read not of the poet's tragic loss of the lover through death, and the pain of her subsequent mourning, but the poet's quietly expressed hope in a continuing relationship with her lover after death, if God so wills:

... and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death (Sonnet XLIII, ll. 13-14).

Similarly, in Sonnet II the poet seems to look to a time when the lovers will be together in God, after death:

And, heaven being rolled between us at the end,
We should but vow the faster for the stars (ll. 13-14).

Again, in this vein, Sonnet XXVII expresses a preference for the spiritual life, introducing the image of the asphodel, the flower of immortality which reputedly grew in the fields of Elysium. We read:

As one who stands in dewless asphodel
Looks backward on the tedious time he had
In the upper life (ll. 10-12).

Life in the spiritual sphere (in this context, the underworld as opposed to "the upper life") is, therefore, preferable to the tedium of existence in the "upper life", the earthly state.

Finally, Sonnet XXXIII makes a strong assertion of the reality of the after-life in God. The poet yearns for her lover to call her by the pet-name that her brother and others, now dead, once used. Of their new life in Heaven, the poet is convinced:

... I miss the clear
Fond voices which, being drawn and reconciled
Into the music of Heaven's undefiled,
Call me no longer (ll. 5-8).

God is the only certainty that awaits our loves ones who have passed into the beyond:

... Silence on the bier,
While I call God - call God! (ll. 8-9).

Throughout the sonnets the term "soul" is used ambiguously - indeed, with a variety of apparent meanings and significances. Sometimes it is introduced to imply the mind in the sense, perhaps, of the Imagination (Sonnet VI, l. 5), or in the sense of the emotional essence of the human individual (Sonnet XIX, l. 1; Sonnet XLIII, l. 3). Elsewhere it appears to be used in the sense of the 'heart', in a romantic context (Sonnet XLIV, l. 14), or to imply simply 'presence' (Sonnet VII, l. 2), or to suggest human nature in a very general sense (Sonnet XXXIX, ll. 4 and 7). The term "soul" is very rarely used to define the immortal aspect of the individual, although it is frequently

introduced with reference to the mind or intellectual being (Sonnet XXXI, l. 3; Sonnet XXXII, l. 14; Sonnet XXXVII, l. 1; Sonnet XL, l. 13; Sonnet XLI, l. 12).

What is more definite, however, is the association of the "soul" with that element in the individual which loves. The poet declares:

> Thy soul hath snatched up mine all faint and weak,
> And placed it by thee on a golden throne, -
> And that I love (O soul, we must be meek!)
> Is by thee only, whom I love alone (Sonnet XII, ll. 11-14).

Again, it is the 'soul' which is satisfied by human love: the lover's feeling for the poet is what fills her "soul with satisfaction of all wants" (Sonnet XXVI, l. 13). In Sonnet XXI the poet speaks of "a doubtful spirit-voice" (l. 8), which seems to refer to the lover's unstated message of his feelings for the poet. She, however, desires this intuitively-projected love to be expressed aloud, although she also needs the lover to love her "in silence" with his "soul" (l. 14).

It is interesting to note the unlikelihood of Elizabeth's usage of a phrase like "spirit-voice" within the context of her poetry, had she written the sonnets later, when her interest in Spiritualism was at its height.

The term 'angel' is used frequently throughout the sequence, literally in the sense of an angelic being (for example, in Sonnet III, l. 3; Sonnet VII, l. 13; Sonnet XXVII, l. 5; Sonnet XXXVIII, l. 5; Sonnet XLII, l. 3). However, in Sonnet XLII, the term is also used in the sense of the angelic aspect of the lover being synonymous with his spiritual awareness. The lover is said to have angels in his soul (l. 7), and he becomes the poet's "new angel" (l. 14). In the same vein, the poet refers to her lover's perception of her as the:

... patient angel waiting for a place
In the new Heavens (Sonnet XXXIX, ll. 8-9).

This, then, is what the lover loves in the poet - her spiritual awareness and hopefulness. Her expectation of the 'new Heavens' may refer to her faith in the after-life or in God's new Kingdom which, in the Christian tradition, will be founded on earth after the Second Coming. The significant factor here, though, is that it is the poet's spiritual essence, described as 'angelic', which inspires love for her in the lover.

The impression of death which the sonnets project is one of its power and magnitude, although, in contrast with many earlier poems previously discussed, Death is not seen to be greater than Love. In Sonnet III, death is a great leveller. Here, the lover is seen as a socialite who moves in lofty circles and is anointed with royal coronation oils, while the poet is a poor singer who is anointed with the dew of the open air (ll. 5-13). While these images are an expression not so much of any genuine social difference between the lovers as of the poet's humility and of her surprise at being the object of her lover's love, they serve to underline the concept of death as a levelling factor: "Death must dig the level where these agree" (l. 14). Implicit too, here, is the notion of death as a final and ultimate unifier of the lovers: they are united as common victims of death. However, although death cannot be defied, Love can at least seem to delay its approach, revitalising the soul of mortal man or woman with its new 'life'. In this vein, the lover has come:

Betwixt me and the dreadful outer brink
Of obvious death (Sonnet VII, ll. 4-5),

so that the poet is sure: "That Love, as strong as Death, retrieves as well" (Sonnet XXVII, l. 14). In the same sonnet we find the idea of the lover snatching the poet from "this drear flat of earth where I was thrown" (l. 2), which is a rather violent image, perhaps, of the grave.

Several sonnets make use of death-imagery which is as extreme, at times, as the latter example. Sonnet XVIII, expressing the poet's surprise at finding herself the object of the lover's love, states that, rather than thinking that her lover would clip her hair in order to obtain a lock of it as a keep-sake, she had expected that "the funeral shears would take this first" (ll. 11-12), a reference to the Greek and Roman custom of cutting the hair of corpses, but implying the poet's expectation of her own likely death. The same sonnet also refers sentimentally to the death of the poet's mother, many years previously; since then, none has kissed her lock of hair as the lover is now privileged to do (ll. 13-14). Sonnet XIX also introduces the image of the lock of hair - again, in a sentimental and somewhat grotesque manner: the poet has placed her lover's lock on her breast, where it will remain warm until she "grows cold in death" (l. 14). Even more extreme is the image of the buried poet in Sonnet XXIII, where she wonders if her lover's life would lack anything if she were to die (ll.1-2). We read:

> And would the sun for thee more coldly shine
> Because of grave-damps falling round my head? (ll. 3-4).

In Sonnet II there is the gruesome image of the deathweights, the pennies which were placed upon the eyelids of the dead to keep them closed. The poet believed that God was calling her to her death, and that thought was like a curse on her eyelids, closing them so that

she could not even have seen the lover when he came into her life (ll. 4-6). At the same time, she would have died anyway when God's purpose had attained its fulfilment, so her eyes would have closed, in a literal sense, at that moment:

> God ... laid the curse
> So darkly on my eyelids, as to amerce
> My sight from seeing thee, - that if I had died,
> The deathweights, placed there, would have signified
> Less absolute exclusion (ll. 4-8).

There would have been "less absolute exclusion" from the lover for the poet behind her closed eyes, because they would then have been closed to the sight of him, too, so that she would have been, in effect, unaware of being excluded from him.

Similarly there is the ash-imagery in Sonnet V which seems strange and morbid to the modern reader. The urn of ashes symbolises the poet's grief and loneliness, her loveless life. This she empties at the feet of her lover:

> I lift my heavy heart up solemnly,
> As once Electra her sepulchral urn,
> And, looking in thine eyes, I overturn
> The ashes at thy feet (ll. 1-4).

Nearly all of the poet's ashes are dead, though some are dying coals. She warns him either to stamp these out (that is, to smother her developing affection for him), or to be prepared to face them flaring up (that is, to be ready to deal with the situation should she fall passionately in love with him, ll. 7-14). The significance of the imagery is the Electra legend of Greek mythology, in which the urn of ashes is not a symbol of death and decay, but of the resurrection and restoration of hope and happiness from what had been grief,

despondency and mourning (6).

However, the Sonnets are not, on the whole, characterised by the same degree of grotesque death-imagery as has been noted in earlier poems. This, again, is perhaps an indication of the optimism of the sequence. The deathly images in the sonnets are by no means as morbid, even, as the examples discussed above. In Sonnet XVII, for instance, the poet's desire to be everything to her lover leads her naturally to include death in such a list:

> How, Dearest, wilt thou have me for most use?
> A hope, to sing by gladly? or a fine
> Sad memory, with thy songs to interfuse?
> A shade, in which to sing - of palm or pine?
> A grave, on which to rest from singing? Choose (ll. 10-14).

The first sonnet in the sequence probably makes most competent and restrained use of death imagery, through the simple medium of personification. In Sonnet I, the poet mistakes the approach of Love for that of Death. The sonnet establishes a depressing picture of the poet's sad life, in which she had nothing to look for but the encroachment of death. Finally, she believed that Death had arrived to seize her; however, the optimistic ending of the poem is that the arrival was not Death, but Love:

> ... Straightway I was 'ware,
> So weeping, how a mystic Shape did move
> Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair;
> And a voice said in mastery, while I strove, -
> 'Guess now who holds thee?' - 'Death', I said. But, there,
> ~~But, there~~,
> The silver answer rang, - 'Not Death, but Love' (ll. 9-14).

The power of these lines is their ability to compress the complex emotional and psychological aspects of falling in love, into a few, brief lines, while the personification - technique is a skilful method, in the allegorical tradition, of discussing an abstract state or condition - that is, Love - in a form which renders it immediately more simple, accessible and straightforward. The final image, of the "silver answer" ringing, far from being a tawdry motif, is effective in conveying a sense of the bell-like impression with which the poet's gradual realisation of Love's presence, dawned upon her. There may even be an anticipation of wedding bells here, in contrast with the funeral tolling which the poet might have expected to hear, since she was waiting for Death.

Finally, in considering the sonnet-form of the poems in this sequence, it is as well to remember that this form has traditionally been used to express a central idea or concept through the medium of one, short poem. In this context, each sonnet may be said to be an expression of the poet's changing emphasis, perception or mood as she explores the subject of her love and the different aspects relating to it, so that those sonnets which deal more specifically with the themes of death, God and the spiritual existence are more concentrated expressions of these ideas.

To conclude, therefore, Sonnets from the Portuguese, while probably constituting the most optimistic and the most lastingly popular poetry from Elizabeth's pen, do not ignore the subjects of death and the question of human immortality. Here, the framework of the poems is, again, loosely Christian - or, at least, monotheistic - and while the sonnets deal primarily with human love in an earthly, worldly sense, they are hopeful that love-relationships may be continued after death in a spiritual existence of some kind. Whether

or not the spirits of those who were lovers on earth are 'unsexed' and relate to one another in a purely ethereal sense, as disembodied souls, the sonnets do not indicate, but that those from this world do commune with those whom they knew on earth, does suggest that the surviving spirit retains the individuality of its earthly personality, and is not simply absorbed into a vast cosmic soul. Throughout the sonnets, all is viewed within the context of the existence of an omnipotent God who is interested in the good-will of human individuals. It is He who is the sustaining presence behind any such spiritual existence that the lovers might experience after death. The sonnets, because of their chief concern - the love between individuals in this world - have little to say with regard to what a spiritual existence might be like; the image of Heaven and of disembodied souls which they do present is disappointingly conventional: for example, the latter are angels with fiery wings. The main point concerning the human spirit which emerges from the sequence is that it is this element which provides the human individual with the capacity for Love - both to be the object of it, and to extend it to others. Finally, the sonnets make considerable use of relevant imagery; there is less death and grave symbolism in the sequence than in preceding poems, but that which does appear is consistent with earlier usage of such imagery in that, at worst, it reveals grotesque obsessiveness - at best, competent handling of powerful and evocative similes and metaphors.

Notes to Chapter Five

(1) It would seem that others perceived in Elizabeth herself something of this intensity of feeling that appeared to threaten the destruction of her physical form. Sophia A. Hawthorne, for example, wrote of Elizabeth on June 10, 1858, after having met her in Florence: "I ought rather to say that she lives so ardently that her delicate earthly vesture must soon be burnt up and destroyed by her soul of pure fire", (Notes in England and Italy, p. 362).

Similarly, though in a less intense vein, George S. Hillard, a lawyer, politician and critic from Boston, wrote of Elizabeth that he had "never seen a human frame which seemed so nearly a transparent veil for a celestial and immortal spirit", (Six Months in Italy (Boston, Mass., 1853), I, 178).

(2) Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786-1846) was a historical and religious painter, admired by Scott, Keats, Lamb and Wordsworth. At one time arrested for debt, Haydon became insane following disappointment at failing to secure a commission to decorate the Houses of Parliament, and shot himself in his studio. Although his execution rarely matched the grandeur of his artistic ambition, Keats wrote his sonnet 'Great spirits now on earth are sojourning' in praise of him, while Wordsworth's 'High is our calling, friend! creative art;' is similarly adulatory.

Haydon was an acquaintance of the eccentric Seymour Kirkup; Elizabeth began to correspond with Haydon in the spring of 1842, but found his embittered, testy nature difficult to understand. Early in October 1842 he sent her his portrait 'Wordsworth musing upon Helvellyn', which inspired Elizabeth's sonnet very soon afterwards; Elizabeth and Wordsworth subsequently corresponded upon the subject, for Haydon sent her poem to Wordsworth (Taplin, p. 107).

Elizabeth received much in the way of artistic education from Haydon, while he greatly needed her steadying influence. Although their correspondence had ceased by 1844, Elizabeth was greatly distressed by Haydon's death. He directed her to be the editor of his memoirs, but she, realising her unsuitability for the task, declined it (Taplin , p. 171).

(3) Elizabeth began to read the novels of George Sand (1804-1876) soon after her return from Torquay in 1840 (Taplin, p. 97), although she was shocked by the 'immoral' content of much contemporary French fiction (Taplin, pp. 97-8). Elizabeth became a great admirer of George Sand, however, whom she "worshipped as one of the great genuises of the age" (Taplin, p. 252). In February 1852 the Brownings visited George Sand twice, and observed her in her salon discussing politics (Taplin, pp. 252-3). Elizabeth's enthusiasm for her was unshaken by these visits, while Browning "was offended by the untidy bohemian atmosphere" (Taplin, p. 253). He subsequently met her on five or six occasions, and once walked the length of the Tuileries with her; however, he found her difficult to relate to, and she, for her part, clearly considered that she had little in common with either him or Elizabeth, for she "left Paris without returning their calls" (ibid).

Gardner B. Taplin suggests that George Sand, 'Aurore' Dudevant, was the inspiration for the name which Elizabeth gave to her heroine Aurora Leigh (Taplin, p. 313).

(4) The notion of George Sand being 'unsexed' in Heaven may relate to the concept of the God who combines both sexes in one being, which occurs in Greek mythology in the Hermaphroditus legend. This notion, in turn, probably derived from Eastern religions.

Even in the Christian tradition there is a suggestion that,

after death, the spirit is no longer subject to gender distinctions. Christ declared: "When they rise from the dead, men and women do not marry; they are like angels in heaven" (Mark XIII, v. 25).

Such a notion, however, would seem to contradict spiritualist 'doctrine', in which the 'spirits' who communicated from the other world normally did so in the identity which had distinguished them while on earth - and that included retaining the gender into which they had been born on this earth. Some spiritualists, however, believed that this manner of appearing did not reflect the actual state of the 'spirit' in the spirit-world, but was merely the means whereby the spirit could be readily identified by the sitter with whom it was attempting to communicate.

It is more likely here, however, that Elizabeth's meaning embodied her feminism. In speaking of George Sand being 'unsexed' after death, Elizabeth may well be implying that it will only be in the spiritual state that, unhampered by the social stigma and prejudice confronting the intellectual woman, George Sand will be able to give full vent to her spiritual power and energy, transcending the gender-classification that sometimes limited the activities of contemporary women such as herself.

(5) Louis de Camoens, or Camoes (1524-1580) was a poor Portuguese poet who, in about 1542, fell deeply in love with Donna Catarina Ataide, one of the queen's maids of honour. Because of his low social standing, Catarina's father rejected Camoens suit for her hand in marriage, upon which the poet resolved to gain acceptability in this respect by accompanying King John III's expedition against the Moors in Africa. Camoens' valour secured his recall to court, but on his return Catarina had died.

This story, apart from being the inspiration of this poem of Elizabeth's, also provided the title for her later sonnet-

sequence: 'Sonnets from the Portuguese', as will be described shortly in the chapter.

(6) Orestes, Electra's brother, had planned to avenge the death of his father in cognito, so had circulated a rumour concerning his own death, and produced an urn of ashes which were supposedly his own. His beloved sister Electra, however, upon hearing of her brother's 'death', was prostrate with grief. Orestes' revelation to her of his survival, and of the bogus nature of his supposed funeral ashes, filled Electra with joyous relief. The urn of ashes, therefore, far from symbolising death and sorrow, indicated the joy of Electra's discovery that her brother was, after all, alive.

Chapter Six: 'Poems' (1850) 'Casa Guidi Windows' (1851), and 'Poems before Congress' (1860)

Elizabeth's volume Poems (1850) reflects, on the whole, the optimistic mood predominant in Sonnets from the Portuguese, the latter cycle forming, indeed, the later section of the 1850 volume.

Poems (1850) included Elizabeth's "earlier and later writings" ('Advertisement', Poems, 1850) as well as many hitherto-unpublished poems. The dominant theme of the volume is an assertion of the value of human love, reflecting the tone of Sonnets from the Portuguese, together with an increasing emphasis upon a concept of the universe in terms of a unified cosmos in which unity between different forms of life, and unity with God, is implied. Throughout the volume there is a sense of life having a definite purpose, and this purpose is normally seen in terms of Man's constant spiritual quest for God, and the human yearning to seek the purposes of His mysterious ways through the enlightenment of the spirit.

The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point (c. 1846) is a moving narrative concerned with the anti-slavery movement in America. Gardner B. Taplin describes it as a "horrifying story". (Taplin, p. 194). The poem is a powerful piece of writing in which the poet succeeded in avoiding the lapse into excessive sentimentality found in some other poems concerned with tragic or distressing situations. Here, however, despite the theme of the poem - the pitiful deaths of a negress slave and her lover - the omniscient handling of the subject is largely controlled and untainted by mawkishness. This is possibly due to the fact that here the poet was writing in support of a particular cause, and her intention was to awaken the reader's sympathy by didactically appealing, in a direct sense, to the reader's moral awareness rather than to the

emotional susceptibilities.

The Runaway Slave stresses the sense of cosmic unity which exists between the natural world and the souls of the departed pilgrim-fathers. The lines concerning the latter are among the most explicit references to disembodied spirits in Elizabeth's poetry considered so far:

O pilgrim-souls, I speak to you!
I see you come proud and slow
From the land of the spirits pale as dew
And round me and round me ye go (ll. 8-11).

There are other references too to "pilgrim-souls" (l. 98), and "the pilgrim-ghosts" (l. 200).

These 'souls' are seen to be in perfect unity with the natural world of the poem:

And thus I thought that I would come
And kneel here where ye knelt before,
And feel your souls around me hum
In undertone to the ocean's roar (ll. 15-18).

The poem is structurally divisible into three sections. In the first, the stylistic power of the poem emerges through the poet's manipulation of contrasts which serve to intensify the slaves' plight: whereas the pilgrims' liberated souls are in union with the cosmos, their freedom contrasts with the 'enslavement' of the blacks' souls:

About our souls in care and cark
Our blackness shuts like prison-bars:
The poor souls crouch so far behind
That never a comfort can they find
By reaching through the prison-bars (ll. 38-42).

There is, of course, a further contrast between the blackness of the slave and the whiteness of her masters. This contrast of colour is intensified by the element of disharmony - indeed, of hatred - between the two. Again, contrastingly God is the giver of liberty (l. 4), and yet if He is omnipotent then it would appear that He had created the slaves with the intention of making them inferior:

> I am black, I am black
> And yet God made me, they say:
> But if He did so, smiling back
> He must have cast His work away
> Under the feet of His white creatures,
> With a look of scorn, that the dusky features
> Might be trodden again to clay (ll. 22-28).

These contrasting factors - the ultimate power of God as Creator, and the hopeless deprivation of the oppressed slaves, are re-echoed in stanzas VII and VIII.

The second section of the poem consists of the narrative of the slaves' story, describing the negress falling in love with another slave (ll. 59-63). It was in this way, the slave asserts, that the 'spirits' of the two lovers were 'set free':

> And from that hour our spirits grew
> As free as if unsold, unbought (ll. 64-65).

Here again we find - as in Sonnets from the Portuguese - an expression of the notion that the human 'spirit' is that element of the individual which either inspires love or does itself feel love for others. However, unlike the pilgrim-souls, whose liberation and union with the elements is free, the slaves, who, despite their love, remain fettered in practical terms, are described as having a far more sinister

union with more menacing natural forces:

In the sunny ground between the canes,
He said 'I love you' as he passed;
When the shingle-roof rang sharp with the rains
I heard how he vowed it fast:
While others shook he smiled in the hut
As he carved me a bowl of the cocoa-nut
Through the roar of the hurricanes (ll. 71-77, my emphasis).

Again, the sylistic intensity of the poem in terms of contrasting extremes is emphasised in the slaves' helpless cry to God (ll. 85-91), which contrasts with the pilgrim-souls' prayer in thanksgiving for their safe delivery in America (ll. 2-4). The slave cries:

Yes, two, O God, who cried to Thee,
Though nothing didst Thou say!
Coldly Thou sat'st behind the sun
And now I cry who am but one,
Thou wilt not speak to-day (ll. 87-91).

The reason for the slave's despair is the death of her black lover at the hands of his white overseers (ll. 96-7). The slave's plight at the hands of the whites is described as an essentially spiritual deprivation, implying that extreme physical suffering results, ultimately, in suffering of the spirit:

The master's look, that used to fall
On my soul like his lash... (ll. 144-145).

Again, spiritual states and practical events are related in the effect which the slave's spiritual suffering has on her actions: she murders the child which she bore when her white master subjected her

to his advances (stanza XXII).

The child has now entered a spiritual existence, and this is conceived in disappointingly human and sentimental terms:

- Your fine white angels (who have seen
Nearest the secret of God's power)
And plucked my fruit to make them wine,
And sucked the soul of that child of mine
As the humming-bird sucks the soul of the flower (ll. 157-61).

These lines describing the spiritual state are, perhaps, a major weakness in an otherwise powerful and effective poem, and, from the point of view of present purposes, they are the more disappointing. The last image, the notion of the angels 'sucking out' the soul of the child is particularly inappropriate not only for its grotesqueness but also for its sensuousness, in which respect it recalls similar imagery in Keats' early poetry. It is important to recognise, however, that Elizabeth's imagery relating to spirituality consists of poetic devices, and her human-like angels are therefore more a convenient and accessible image for inscrutable supernatural entities than a genuine expression, perhaps, of her concept of the nature of those entities in real terms. Moreover, here the angels' whiteness serves to accentuate the slave's blackness and her isolation.

Through the forst-tops the angels far,
With a white sharp finger from every star,
Did point and mock at what was done (ll. 180-83).

It is fitting that the slave, persecuted by the white world, should see even God's angels as 'white' persecutors. Her hatred of whites, therefore, distorting as it does her concept of supernatural powers, serves to express her total despair, hopelessness and isolation.

Only when the child is dead, its whiteness - indeed, its very existence - ceasing to remind the slave of the whites who have been the cause of all her misery, only then can she feel genuine maternal sympathies for her child:

> And thus we two were reconciled,
> The white child and black mother, thus;
> For as I sang it soft and wild,
> The same song, more melodious,
> Rose from the grave wherein I sate:
> It was the dead child singing that,
> To join the souls of both of us (ll. 190-96).

The morbidity of these lines should be seen as an expression of the poet's didactic argument: the fact that the black slave can only love her white child when that child is dead, serves to underline the sheer destructiveness of white persecution of blacks.

The third section of the poem develops the latter theme: the 'union' of blacks and whites in a common humanity is a mockery because of the hatred between them (ll. 233-35). In Christ, however, the blacks are finally 'united' to God's purposes and find spiritual peace themselves (ll. 235-245). Complete spiritual 'liberty', however, can only be attained by the slave in terms of her own death (ll. 245-49). In the spiritual state alone will she be reconciled to the ultimate purposes of God, united to her child and at one with the white world:

> In the name of the white child waiting for me
> In the death-dark where we may kiss and agree,
> White men, I leave you all curse-free
> In my broken heart's disdain! (ll. 250-53).

The poem's concept of the spiritual life, therefore, is perhaps sentimental, and in human form. Interestingly, once more it implies a retention of individual personality (that is, the mother and child will be reconciled in the spiritual life as individuals, and will retain the identity which characterised them on this earth). However, the poem is less a glorification of the after-life than a didactic plea for change in white/black relationships in America, that peace between the races may be attained in this world to avoid the pitiful alternative of negro slaves being able to find peace of the spirit only after death.

The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point explores two of the main thematic preoccupations of the 1850 volume. One is the notion of Unity, the unity in Nature and between God and the spirit of Man, and the other is the concept of Love, which reflects the first in so far as it signifies the union of two lovers' souls, and their harmony with God, the Supreme Soul. As in Sonnets from the Portuguese, it was Elizabeth's recent, hopeful love-relationship with Browning which no doubt inspired the generally optimistic tone of Poems (1850).

Other poems which explore the themes of Unity and Love simultaneously include the sonnet Love. Here, Love is seen as the result of the human soul's intense projection of itself towards another:

> But when a soul, by choice and conscience, doth
> Throw out her full force on another soul,
> The conscience and the concentration both
> Make mere life, Love (ll. 9-12).

The concept of Unity is reflected in the unity which Love brings to life:

> For Life in perfect whole
> And aim consummated, is Love in sooth,
> As Nature's magnet - heat rounds pole with pole (ll. 12-14).

Here, the image of magnetism and the poles, implying unity and harmony in Nature and in the balanced state of the world, is apt in its application, where the intention of the poet is to express - concisely, through the compact form of the sonnet, the harmony within the Love-state, and the poet's belief that, as before, it is the immortal human soul which is that aspect of humanity with the capacity to love.

Other poems which celebrate human love in this volume include The Claim, and Life and Love, which describes the hopefulness of Love - as "chrism" to the dying (l. 8). Here we find a morbid picture of the dying:

Fast this life of mine was dying,
Blind already and calm as death,
Snowflakes on her bosom lying
Scarcely heaving with her breath (ll. 1-4).

However, Death is not idealised in the poem, but described in gruesome terms:

... Breathed as finely as the cold did
Through the locking of her lips (ll. 11-12).

Here, however, Love (either the love of God, or the love of another individual towards the poet) is seen as the power which succours the dying: Love, therefore, sustains the individual through the dark passage of death, and promises hope of immortality (ll. 13-16). On the other hand, it is left unclarified whether the poet is indeed speaking of literal, physical death in the light of which Love can sustain, or of Death in a purely symbolic sense, implying that the loveless state is akin to death in its negativity and hopelessness, whereas to love and to be loved is a positive and vital state personifying life itself.

Inclusions is similarly a celebration of the ideal of Love. Each of the three stanzas of the poem opens with a similar line, suggesting a ballad - structure in which the argument is conveyed simply and concisely in the form of a brief, didactic narrative concerning a courtship in which the beauty of Love is celebrated. Here, Love is again seen as a spiritual quality, and the love-union of two individuals implies the union of their souls:

> Oh, must thou have my soul, Dear, commingled with thy soul! -
> Red grows the cheek, and warm the hand; the part is in the whole:
> Nor hands nor cheeks keep separate, when soul is joined to soul
> (ll. 7-9).

A Woman's Shortcomings, too, considers the ideal of Love. Again, Love is of the "soul" (l. 5); because the human soul is immortal, Love is therefore "For life, for death!" (l. 31). Since ideal Love has this immortal quality, therefore ideally there is the need to love even when one's lover has passed beyond physical death:

> Unless you can love, as the angels may,
> With the breadth of heaven betwixt you ... (ll. 35-36),

and to aspire to die too, to join the dead lover in a spiritual state (l. 39).

A Man's Requirements provides an amusing contrast with the previous poem. Again, the subject is the soulful nature of Love; the lover is exhorted "Love me with thy thinking soul" (l. 25). Because Love is of the soul, which is immortal, it, too, has an eternal quality, and is to endure through life and death (l. 28). The poem refers to guardian angels (l. 32), who therefore appear to be christianised versions of the 'spirit-guides' believed in by some spiritualists. The poem is interesting for the comic style of its final stanza, a sample of Elizabeth's wry humour. The man addresses his lover:

Thus, if thou wilt prove me, Dear,
Woman's love no fable,
I will love thee - half a year -
As a man is able (ll. 41-44)

Often in the 1850 volume romantic love is darkened by doubt in a rather more serious sense. Since the argument of the poems generally is that Love is a high ideal, a function of the immortal soul and an expression of spiritual yearning and unselfishness, when this Love is doubted there is an implication of accompanying spiritual deprivation. Proof and Disproof regards the consideration of Love as a soulful activity (l. 4) and the expression of darkening doubt as to the lover's genuine feeling for the poet is asserted in appropriately deathly (if morbid) imagery:

But thou comest as the thrower
Of fresh flowers upon a grave (ll. 29-30).

The monologue-style of the poem is movingly sppropriate to the theme, for here the poet addresses the doubted lover in direct, personal and intimate terms.

A Denial expresses a more tragic reason for the soul's potential disappointment before frustrated Love. The Love ideal is asserted throughout the poem, but the poet's argument is that she must reject her lover's advances because she is dying and can therefore offer him no happiness:

Can life and death agree,
That thou shouldst stoop thy song to my complaint? (ll. 13-14).

The poem, again, suggests that the act of state of loving is a spiritual one (ll. 18, 36, 55), while the approach of Death is described in morbid imagery: "Death's forecome shroud is tangled round my feet" (l. 3). However, the style of the poem, once again, borrows something from the ballad-form, with its repeated final line at the close of

each stanza. This has the effect of skilfully objectifying an otherwise intensely morbid and, to the modern mind, contrivedly pathetic theme: although the voice of the poet is again a personal monologue intimately addressed to the lover, the impression is created through the ballad-form, that this is more than a morbid story of personal misfortune, but a tragic tale being exploited by the poet for its didactic or entertainment value. This, in turn, has the effect of partially objectifying the theme.

Question and Answer also asserts the ideal of Love (l. 1), but darkly implies that Love can be destroyed. The imagery here is ably handled by the poet, and suitable to the theme of Love:

> Tell me, do you find moss-roses
> Budding, blooming in the snow?
> Snow might kill the rose-tree's root ... (ll. 3-5),

and:

> From the ivy where it dapples
> A grey ruin, stone by stone,
> Do you look for grapes and apples,
> Or for sad green leaves alone? (ll. 8-11).

The use of plant and fruit imagery here suggests the concept of Love as an organic phenomenon, something which 'grows' but can easily be 'uprooted' or destroyed. The introduction of the apple (l. 10) is especially significant, recalling the symbol of the Eden-apple with its ambiguous relationship to Love and Fall. Here, the symbols of Fall - or, at any rate, of frustration or destruction acting against Love - are the snow (cold, paralysing), and the ruin (decayed, spoiled) (ll. 5, 9).

Insufficiency also expresses the pathos of unrequited love, the repetitive final lines of the two stanzas again serving to partly

objectify the sentimentality of the theme (ll. 5, 10). Change upon Change, too, concerns the negative aspect of human love, and the fickleness of the lover. The 'death' of the lover's affection for the narrator is, as in Question and Answer, described in natural terms - lilies, rivers, flowers (ll. 1-9). It should be noted that such stylistic use of natural imagery to describe states of human love, effectively relates the human condition to the wider universe; this pathetic fallacy, signifying a sympathy between Man and his environment, relates to the theme of cosmic unity throughout the volume, conveying an impression of the ideal harmony which should naturally exist between the soul and its Creator.

A Year's Spinning, which, again, makes use of the objectivity available through the ballad-form with its repetitive, chorus-like final line, also concerns the more negative aspect of human love (ll. 29-30). The poem asserts that to love humanity, or to love a child, is insufficient to attain spiritual integrity and fulfilment. In the poem, the poet's love for a man is destroyed by her mother's curse (ll. 11-14); both the poet's mother and her baby die:

> Bury me 'twixt my mother's grave,
> (Who cursed me on her death-bed lone)
> And my dead baby's ... (ll. 21-23).

The literal deaths of the mother and child relate thematically to the 'death' of the poet's happiness and her love, and these themes and ideas relate in turn to the death-imagery of the poem, in a stylistic fusion of theme and symbolism:

> A stone upon my heart and head,
> But no name written on the stone! (ll. 26-27).

The morbidity of such an image appropriately characterises a sombre poem (unrelieved by any spiritual hopefulness or promise) in which death in the literal sense parallels the death of human love

and of the spiritual happiness which would be attained through it.

Calls on the Heart is a more optimistic poem in that it concerns the soul's attainment of eternal life, although here, again, Love is seen as a corruptible or transient emotion. The "free heart" (l. 1) is seen as the liberated human soul which should ideally avoid the corrupting systems and organisations of worldly life (ll. 1-44). A better course for the soul is the pursuit of Love (stanza iv). Nevertheless, the soul's natural desire to pursue Love is doomed to frustration, either because "Love may be false and frail" (l. 59), or because:

> ... Death has quickened his pace
> To the hearth, with a mocking face,
> Familiar as Love, in Love's own place (ll. 72-74).

However, although the poem is a regretful assertion of the soul's frustration through Love's transcience and the onslaught of Death, unlike A Year's Spinning it offers the human spirit hope in terms of immortality:

> Howbeit all is not lost ...
> ... through the silence shall
> Pierce the death-angel's call,
> And 'Come up hither', recover all (ll. 89, 94-96).

The use of the "death-angel" as a persona for Death lacks the sentimentality of the human-like 'white angels' of heaven elsewhere in Elizabeth's poetry, because the death-angel is a sinister entity, lacking the comfortable smugness, the cosy primness of the white heavenly angels. The poem, again, stylistically owes something to the ballad as regards its form.

Wisdom Unapplied is also a warning against the human soul's pursuit of "love's great jeopardy" (l. 45). The poet, while despising

lower forms of creation for following their respective natural preoccupations (stanza i - ix), is herself exhorted by an angel to cease such condescending speculation: she should herself "look above" (l. 42) "and live for life past death and doubt" (l. 51). In a volume which is largely concerned to celebrate human love, Wisdom Unapplied is remarkable for its rejection of Love as an ultimately fulfilling aim for the immortal human soul.

Other poems parallel Wisdom Unapplied in its rejection of alternative pursuits and insistence upon a metaphysical solution to the human soul's restlessness and yearning. Confessions signifies a rejection not so much of romantic love as of humanistic altruism, urging that it is better for the soul to aspire towards God than humanity. The poem takes the interesting form of a dialogue between a confessor (the poet) and a female confessant. This dialogue style is highly appropriate both in literal terms (because the subject of the poem is a confession) and symbolically (because the theme of the poem is a study or exploration of the notion that love for God is superior to love for humanity). Here, God's presence is affirmed (l. 2), the "soul" is seen as the essence of the individual (ll. 2-3), and there is an eschatological suggestion of future judgement in the references to "the angel of resurrection" (l. 4), and "the angels of judgement" (l. 8).

The poem asserts in some powerful and intense lines that the human soul is God's creation:

> When God smote His hands together, and struck out thy soul
> as a spark
> Into the organised glory of things, from deeps of the dark
> (ll. 10-11).

The power of this image is conveyed through the strength of meaning in the words "smote" , "struck" and "spark", which are 'assault'

words expressive of physical violence and fire. The force of these terms is intensified by their single-syllable form, and by the sibilant sound with which each beings.

The poem asserts that the confessant's sin lies in her having turned away from God (ll. 14-16). Oblivious of His omnipotent power, manifesting itself through the unity of the cosmos, and through Nature (stanzas iii-iv), the confessant has been concerned only to love humanity:

> I saw God sitting above me, but I ... I sat among men,
> And I have loved these (ll. 44-45).

She insists that her love - of the dead, for example - has been deep and sure:

> Inquire of the dead,
> In the house of the pale-fronted images.
> My own true dead will answer for me, that I have not loved amiss
> In my love for all these (ll. 51-54),

and, morbidly:

> Dig the snow...
> For my churchyard bed,
> Yet I, as I sleep, shall not fear to freeze,
> If one only of these my beloveds shall love me with heart-warm tears,
> As I have loved these (ll. 59-63).

However, the poem implies that it is insufficient for the human spirit to have loved its fellow humanity in order to attain eternal bliss:

> Yet the weak man dies with his spirit at ease,
> Having poured such an unguent of love but once on the Saviour's feet
> As I lavished for these (ll. 70-72).

This seemingly selfish unworldliness should, perhaps, be seen less as a distinctively firm rejection of social consciousness and

spontaneous emotional responsiveness, than as an affirmation to love the origin of all life as well as other human individuals, especially since the latter impulse is sometimes motivated by possessiveness and a need to receive the attentions of others.

Just as Confessions argues against exclusive humanism, so A Sabbath Morning at Sea argues against obsessive pantheism. The poem is in effect a song of praise, urging the soul to turn to God as opposed to simply loving the natural world: with the prospect of dying in mind, the poet asks:

> I, carried towards the sunless graves
> By force of natural things, - should I
> Exult in only Nature? (ll. 46-48).

She realises, however, that it would be better to go to church to worship formally than to glory in the natural beauty of a Sunday morning at sea:

> It seems a better lot than so,
> To ...
> ... follow children as they go
> In pretty pairs, with softened speech,
> As the church-bells ring nearer (ll. 55, 58-60).

Since the poet is at sea, however, she can only express the hope that friends of hers on land will attend church and pray for her soul, since she cannot do so herself (ll. 61-6). This suggests the view that glorying in God's natural creation is second best to worshipping him through the channels of formalised religion. Nevertheless, the poem does not exclude the possibility of worshipping God through Nature (stanza xii), and it is in the image of His beauty as displayed this sabbath morning that the poet sees the after-life, conceiving of herself rising,

with God's grace:

Where keep the saints with harp and song
And endless sabbath morning (ll. 74-75),

where they look "To the full Godhead's burning" (l. 78). This last line implies that the human spirit, after death, retains its separate nature from God, and is not absorbed totally into His person.

The spiritual theme of the poem, promoted not by a morbid fear of death but a realisation of its inevitability (and hence of the need to consider the ultimate significance of death and its relationship to the human individual), is sustained through the imagery. For example, when referring to two clouds, the poet describes them, significantly, as:

... statues by the open tomb
Of shining saints half-risen (ll. 26-27).

A number of poems in the 1850 volume explore the spiritual significance of death. The Mask, again showing the influence of ballad-form, describes how the narrator, who 'wears' a happy face to the world, has known suffering; significantly, again, from the point of view of this study, it seems that she has lost a loved one through death (l. 9). However, it is her belief that death signifies a liberation because the dead have attained freedom (from earthly suffering, perhaps?), and can therefore 'smile' with peaceful justification (l. 28), presumably knowing in the calmness of death the reason for earthly sufferings, those trials which have caused the narrator such intense inner anguish. In a similar vein, the sonnet The Prospect implies that our present sufferings cloud our vision of the natural life which awaits us beyond death:

And thus, alas, since God the maker drew
A mystic separation 'twixt those twain, -
The life beyond us, and our souls in pain, -
We miss the prospect which we are called unto
By grief we are fools to use (ll. 5-9).

The sonnet is a prayer that God may grant humanity the vision:

... to watch along
The sunset consummation - lights of death (ll. 13-14).

The latter concept of death as a form of consummation is also introduced in the rather sentimental poem A Dead Rose, in which the deadness of the rose symbolises this same consummatory aspect of death. The death-symbolism of the poem is extended further in the image of the "urn" (l. 10); here, the rose-heart, even when the flower was alive, is described as being like an urn in form, which suggests both the appropriateness of the rose as a symbol of deadness, and the inevitability of death itself: even when alive, the rose reminded the poet of such a deathly object as an urn. The dead rose is seen as being "most complete" for its deadness (l. 27), which implies that, again, death is a form of fulfilment, while this idea is re-echoed in the final lines, stating that the faded dead rose is better dead, and loved by the genuinely sincere poet, than living roses worn flippantly by superficial coquettes (ll. 30-32).

Human Life's Mystery sees death as a form of spiritual consummation, in that it reveals the purpose of life (ll. 3-6). The human soul is trapped, or "stifled" within the body (ll. 7-8), and because of its fleshly prison, and its human nature, its spiritual aspirations are thwarted:

We guess diviner things beyond,
And yearn to them with yearning fond;
We strike out blindly to a mark
Believed in, but not seen (ll. 9-12).

Nevertheless, the soul is persistent in its spiritual yearnings:

We vibrate to the pant and thrill
Wherewith Eternity has curled
In serpent-twine about God's seat (ll. 13-15).

The latter image of the serpent, like the symbol of the apple in Question and Answer, is a reminder of Eden and the Fall (implying that Man is tormented by his spiritual/physical dichotomy because of his disobedience in Eden). It also symbolises in its circularity the eternity of God, His consummatory nature, and the all-embracing unity of His creative spirit.

The poem asserts, however, that, despite our human philosophical strivings, God retains His mystery (stanza v). The suggestion here is that, nevertheless, in striving to grasp the mystical, mankind is aspiring towards Heaven and advancing in the expression of spiritual love:

> Yet, touching so, they draw above
> Our common thoughts to Heaven's unknown;
> Our daily joy and pain advance
> To a divine significance
> Our human love (ll. 43-47).

The sense of ultimate mysteries is frightening (ll. 49-54), but, as we strive to resolve these, we are nearing death and, therefore, the attainment of penetrating these mysteries (ll. 55-60). When we have, indeed, finally become a part of that mysterious world, we shall have obtained much enlightenment, though even in the spiritual existence God remains supreme governor. There:

> ... angels from the face of God
> Stand hidden in their wings (ll. 53-54).

A Child's Thought of God also concerns the soul's search for its creator, but the poem is a more simplistic and rather sentimental treatment of Human Life's Mystery; in A Child's Thought of God, although the child is baffled by its contemplations, it takes comfort from the fact that its mother, whose ways are also incomprehensible to the child, is nevertheless a reassuring and loving presence (ll. 10-16). The

parallel is thus drawn between the relationship of parent and child, and God and the human soul.

A number of poems in the volume explore more fully the theme of cosmic unity and its relationship to spiritual integrity found in other poems considered so far. Finite and Infinite, a sonnet concerned with the relationship between the human soul and the natural world, is a plea for spiritual peace in which the concept of unity is expressed in the form of a graphic parallel drawn between the wind, which can only be heard when there is something present for it to react against; the sea, which can only be heard when it is breaking onto a shore; and the human spirit, which is only torn from its natural peace when tormented by extreme states of experience:

> The wind sounds only in opposing straits,
> The sea, beside the shore; man's spirit rends
> Its quiet only up against the ends
> Of wants and oppositions, loves and hates (ll. 1-4).

These situations of torment, however, suggest by their very existence that there is a contrary condition - of total peace (ll. 8-9). The poet pleads with God for this spiritual peace to be granted (ll. 9-10), but concludes that only in ultimate peace and calm (of death, perhaps?) can the soul unite with the Infinite (ll. 12-14).

In the same mood, Heaven and Earth, while stressing the unity, through God, which exists between the two worlds, is a prayer that God will grant:

> ... a half-hour's hush alone
> In compensation for our stormy years (ll. 12-13).

The reference to angels, however, (l. 4) implies, again, that only in the ultimate spiritual state, beyond death, can such peace be

attained. Again, Life stresses the notion that each being is individual, yet relates to the rest of creation in a spirit of universal harmony (ll. 3-8). Such unity also joins the earthly and spiritual spheres, so that a sleeping child is in union with "some soul newly loosened from earth's tombs" (l. 11), and the poet is in unity with "God's calm angel standing in the sun" (l. 14).

Three sonnets consider the theme of artistic creativity in relation to the human spirit and its manifestation in this world. Hiram Powers' "Greek Slave" (1) suggests that the artist's action in creating the beauty of his work was in some way inspired by God, indicating the spiritual nature of the artist's creativity, and the inspiration which, in turn, such works may give to other individuals, urging them to aspire towards spiritual perfection:

> ... appeal, fair stone,
> From God's pure heights of beauty against man's wrong! (ll. 10-11).

Similarly, The Poet considers the role of the poet as esentially spiritual. Here, again, the influence of Wordsworthian - or even Shelleyean - thinking with regard to the spiritual nature of the creative act, can possibly be detected in Elizabeth's view-point. The poet's vocation in The Poet is to praise God, thereby giving witness to the God who is the source of all beauty and the origin of the human spirit which is expressing itself through the medium of the poet's art (ll. 12-14).

Mountaineer and Poet again describes the unity which exists between Nature and Man. Just as the goatherd, who lives among natural beauty, observes his shadow which creates the illusion of augmenting his size, so the poet, who lives among the praise and adulation of literary society, is exhorted not to take egotistical pride in his fame, because his art is due to God (l. 14). All artistic creativity, therefore, is

inspired by God and an expression of the immortal spirit which, in turn, is the creation of God.

Moving on from the consideration of artistic creativity as an expression of human spirituality, there are three sonnets concerned with H. S. Boyd (2), in which through Boyd - Elizabeth's teacher - intellectual activity is also seen as a key to spirituality. Hugh Stuart Boyd: His Blindness describes how Boyd, despite being blind to the physical world, was capable of attaining spiritual enlightenment through his intellectual studies (for example, of Sappho, Meleager and Gregory, l. 10). Indeed, the poem asserts that Boyd's blindness was willed by God:

> God would not let the spheric lights accost
> This God-loved man (ll. 1-2).

The idea of Boyd being denied the physical vision of "spheric lights" suggests that God desired him to attain spiritual enlightenment not through the dramatic phenomenon of a mystical vision. Instead of such a vision, Boyd is aware solely of mental impressions or intellectual thoughts, which the poet describes as "many a ministrant accomplished ghost" (l. 8). The stylistic effectiveness of this spiritual imagery is two-fold: first, the poet is speaking literally of essentially spiritual considerations which Boyd has attained, and secondly because to the blind in their world of total darkness, the 'enlightenment' of thought and idea does indeed approach stealthily, in the darkness, like a ghost or spirit, rather than via the more immediate means of visual, sensory perception.

The poem, finally, asserts that, to the blind man, a totally materialist outlook is insufficient because it is beyond the immediate sensory experience of the blind. To the spiritually -orientated poet, the physical objects of this world are no more 'real' to the blind, she imagines, than "Heaven's angels on the wing" (l. 14). The sonnet therefore

suggests that the mind, the intellectual faculty, can - like the creative or artistic faculty - lead to spiritual 'vision' because the mind is capable of metaphysical aspiration, as in the case of Boyd, even if it is denied the usual channels of sensory apprehension, such as sight and hearing.

Hugh Stuart Boyd: His Death, 1848 echoes the sentiments expressed in the preceding sonnet: despite his blindness, Boyd learnt:

... to keep thy potent soul in tune
To visible nature's elemental cheers (ll. 3-4).

The phrase "in tune" here implies the theme of cosmic unity between God, the soul, and Nature, already discussed as an important element in Poems (1850). Here, death indicates an entry into the spiritual world: God has "caught thee to new hemispheres" (l. 5), and Boyd is goin "to join the Dead found faithful to the end" (l. 14). In this context, the introduction of the scholar's personal angel pleading with God to relieve Boyd from his earthly anguish, is an important factor combining elements from both Elizabeth's Christian beliefs, and her Spiritualism:

I think thine angel's patience first was done ...
'Is it enough, dear God? then lighten so
This soul that smiles in darkness!' (ll. 7, 9-10, my emphasis).

This angel is a skilful stylistic device on the part of the poet, in which popular tradition and Christian symbolism (the idea of the 'guardian angel') combine with the spiritualist notion of the personal 'spirit guide'. More important, this angel is seen to be in intimate communion with God, which places all of these elements beneath His all-embracing omniscience.

Hugh Stuart Boyd: Legacies describes the three gifts which Boyd, "the Dying" (l. 1), left to Elizabeth. The poet yearns to be reunited

with her own friend, and looks forward to "the day which ends these parting-days" (l. 14). The sonnet states that the "soul" of the scholar (l. 6) was able to overcome his physical blindness, through his intellectual pursuits. This theme was fully explored in Hugh Stuart Boyd: His Blindness, as has been seen. It implies considerable insight into Elizabeth's concept of the nature of the soul. For her, Boyd's soul is inextricably related to his intellectual activity: the soul, therefore, is akin to the mental consciousness, being the essence of a particular individual. Since Boyd is a scholar, his 'soul' is his intellectual faculty. It has been seen that the souls of other groups have some other essential quality which is synonymous with the soul, or with the soul's manner of expressing itself: for artists, this quality is their creativity. Earlier poems of Elizabeth's concerned with national heroes saw their 'souls' or their souls' self-expression in terms of their political achievement. This implies that, for Elizabeth, the immortal human soul is the positive aspect of an individual and expresses itself through creative or positive activity of some kind.

One curious poem in Poems (1850) is Hector in the Garden (c. 1846), concerning a large 'giant' of various kinds of flowers which Elizabeth as a child tended in the garden at Hope End, (Taplin, p. 233). The theme of cosmic unity between God and humanity is again explored: the child's and the sun's "spirits" frolick together across the landscape (l. 27). The reference to "the disembodied soul" of Hector (l. 68), implies the belief that the dead retain their own personality after death, while the poet's declaration that childhood memories cannot be destroyed or weakened "despite the deathbell's toll" (l. 98) is a line which serves further to undermine the concept of death as a finality, in a volume of poems generally full of hope in the Christian promises of immortality. As

in Hugh Stuart Boyd: His Death, there is a reference to a single angel's interest in the human individual:

> Help, some angel! stay this dreaming!
> As the bird sang in the branches,
> Sing God's patience through my soul! (ll. 100-103).

Again, here, a relationship is implied between God, the 'personal' angel, and the human soul, and, as before, the notion of the angel's concern for the poet is reminiscent of the spiritualists' belief in a 'spirit-guide' guarding the interests of its human protegé.

A Child's Grave at Florence (c. 1849), a poem only moderately less sentimental than its title implies, is concerned with death, the after-life, and the Christian hope in Love. Again, the subject of the poem has biographical relevance (3). The dead child is in heaven (l. 4), and is in the ironic situation of being an English expatriot buried in Italy, as Elizabeth herself was to be: the child is described as a "Tuscan lily" (l. 21), Tuscan by birth and residence, but lily-white because of Anglo-Saxon parentage. In addition the lily is of course traditionally associated with death. The theme of the poem becomes mawkish when the poet quotes the child's mother as ideally believing that the child has, through death, attained a higher plane:

> The angels have thee, Sweet,
> Because we are not worthy (ll. 55-56).

The grotesque sentimentality of this notion to the modern mind is partially offset by the fact that the poet's aim is not negatively to revel in or to glorify the death of a child, but to assert the positivism of survival: children are of God (ll. 39-40), and the poet's plea is for faith to believe in the traditional Christian promise:

Sustain this heart in us that faints
Thou God, the self-existent!
We catch up wild at parting saints
And feel Thy heaven too distant (ll. 65-68).

Heaven is a "home" (l. 124) in which family ties persist: the dead child, though in heaven, retains her individuality, her personality, and is still her mother's child (ll. 93-98), while the souls of both are still united (ll. 99-100). The poem's didactic is, as in poems already discussed, that death has a consummatory element: the child has attained "Heaven's completeness" (ll. 107-114). However, death is not to be glorified for its own sake in consummatory terms, but to be seen as destructible itself:

Love, strong as Death, shall conquer Death
Through struggle made more glorious (ll. 89-90),

lines which re-echo the affirmative concept of Love found in earlier poems.

The poem is, therefore, thematically a positive affirmation of the power of Love, and it asserts that, in the spiritual world, the disembodied soul retains its individuality; again we find the notion of the 'guardian angel', which parallels the spiritualist concept of a 'spirit-guide'. However, the spiritual positivism of the poem is to an extent undermined by the style, which is sometimes symbolically grotesque. A further example of this is the mother's address to her child:

And may the angels dewy-lipped
Remind thee of our kisses! (ll. 119-120).

Poems (1850) as a whole, therefore, re-echoes the optimistic tone of Sonnets from the Portuguese. Some of the poems concern the fickleness and corruptible nature of Love, but for the most part the validity of that

is sustained. Love is clearly seen as an expression of the human spirit, as are Art, intellectual and all constructive or creative activities. The human spirit is regarded as of immortal nature, and its passing from this world is consistently considered in Christian terms. Indeed, the Christian God is present more or less throughout the volume, providing a comforting and encompassing background to the poet's speculations, together with an increasing sense of a unified cosmos in which God, humanity and Nature co-exist in an atmosphere of universal harmony. The spiritual life is seen both as an eternity with God, and as a retention of individual personality, while frequently the poet indicates the presence of particular spiritual entities who are in communion with the human individual and are assigned with his or her protection. Stylistically the volume represents a development in the poet's technique, especially in the spheres of symbolism and imagery, which, for the most part, are handled with greater skill and control and a more pronounced selectivity than before. Such stylistic improvements coincide with the poet's thematic development: since there are few poems concerned with material of a more mawkish nature, there appears to be a corresponding movement away from the use of grotesque and sentimental imagery characteristic of earlier poems. This change, in turn, can be traced to a development in the poet's mood and attitude towards the world, all of which were doubtless due to a happier and more positive period in her personal life - her marriage with Browning.

The poem entitled Casa Guidi Windows (4) concerns the political events which occurred in Italy during the 1840's, and was published in 1851. In this sphere, Elizabeth's understanding of the events was in many respects naive and inconsistent. She was naively convinced of the Pope's and the Duke of Tuscany's magnanimity in political matters, falsely believed in the honourable motives behind the French military

intervention in Italian affairs, and misunderstood the attitudes behind British diplomacy, generally underestimating the help given by Britain to the Italian cause. Be that as it may, the first part of the poem was written during 1847-8, and describes the liberalism of the new Pope Pius IX, elected in 1846, the wave of unrest which rocked Austrian-ruled Italy in 1847, and the granting of a constitution to Tuscany in February, 1848. The second part of the poem, finished in 1851, expresses Elizabeth's disillusionment with the events in Tuscany in 1848-9, and the crushing of the revolution by the Pope and the Grand Duke of Tuscany. The volume was therefore essentially political in tone, and therefore differed from most of Elizabeth's earlier poetry - although, as has been seen, some of her poems prior to Casa Guidi Windows had concerned national heroes and political reformers. On the whole, however, the theme of the poem marks a development in Elizabeth's work away from the more sentimental poems so far discussed, towards the practical, worldly spheres of politics and revolution. Most significant of all, however (and indicative of the poet's continuing preoccupation with death) is that, despite the worldly, political nature of her theme, the poet frequently resorted to the use of imagery taken from the subject of death.

In Part One of the poem, the poet's selection of such imagery is an appropriate mode for her expression of grief at the 'death' of Italian liberal hopes: her image for Italy is the Roman fertility goddess Cybele, whom she describes in human funerealterms; Cybele is laid:

> ... Corpse-like on a bier..
> Where all the world might drop for Italy
> Those cadenced tears which burn not where they touch (I, ll. 33-35).

In a similar vein, Italy, once youthful, ebullient, but now destroyed, is symbolised by the dead Juliet, whose tomb at Verona is

referred to by the poet (I, ll. 39-49). A string of images and symbols in this mode runs throughout the first part of the poem. The poet implies that the plight of the Italian race, its hopes and aspirations totally obliterated, is akin to the fate of the Medici family, whose "ashes ... never more shall clog the feet of men" (I, ll. 96-97).

Italy now sits "still upon her tombs" (I, l. 173), and has for too long swept "heroic ashes up for hour-glass sand" (I, l. 189), failing to fulfil the attempts of her martyred patriots to achieve freedom for the Italian people.

Over two hundred lines of the poem contain an extended image concerned with the heroism of the dead patriots: their "graves" plead for the renewed efforts of the populace (I, l. 214); it is not enough merely to "serve the dead" (I, l. 217), but to act upon their lead and achieve Italian freedom. The veneration of the dead, indeed, has distracted attention from positive political activity (I, ll. 224-26, 230). The freshness of the young "souls" of the nation is therefore being weakened by a preoccupation with merely respecting the example of dead patriots (I, ll. 240-4), and the energies of the new generation too are likely to be wasted in their "graves" and "burial-sods" (I, l. 245). It is true, the poet grants, that "the dust of death" (I, l. 250), can inspire great men - as in the case of the martyred religious reformer Savonarola (1452-1498), whose "soul", burnt in the flames of his martyrdom 'illuminated' the essence of his argument , and 'lit' fires of enthusiasm throughout Italy (I, ll. 256-60). In a more negative sense, it was only when Lorenzo the Magnificent (1448-1492) lay dying, his "soul" threatened with damnation (I, l. 272), that men were moved to attempt to wrest Florence from the clutches of his family (I, ll. 271-78). All this is true; but the poet concedes:

The emphasis of death makes manifest
The eloquence of action in our flesh (I, ll. 279-80),

and:

... men who, living, were but dimly guessed,
When once free from life's entangled mesh
Show their full length in graves (I, ll. 281-83).

However, her argument is that, although it is essential to venerate the example of the dead, this should not occur to an obsessive extent, and not at the expense of positive action in this world. It is argued that the Italians should "plant the great Hereafter in this Now" (I, l. 299), by creating 'heaven' on 'earth', as it were - an interesting and more positive notion of the condition of any future 'spiritual' life which we might have being dependent upon our activities in this world.

The poet, then, argues for positive activity on the part of the living, as opposed to negative mourning and veneration of the dead (I, ll. 404-409, 422, 426-27, 433, 437), and this argument is clearly stated as follows:

Then let the living live, the dead retain
Their grave-cold flowers! - though honour's best supplied
By bringing actions, to prove theirs not vain.
Cold graves, we say? it shall be testified
That living men who burn in heart and brain,
Without the dead were colder (I, ll. 412-17).

Indeed, later on in the poem it is implied that only those who are active in putting their ideals into practice, are able fully to appreciate the example of the dead:

... the piercingest sweet-smell
Of Love's dear incense by the living sent
To find the dead, is not accessible

To lazy livers ...
But trod out in the morning air by hot
Quick spirits who tread firm to ends foreshown,
And use the name of greatness unforgot,
To meditate what greatness may be done (I, ll. 640-48).

It is those who will succeed in moving onto positive political action, therefore, who will be regarded in the future as "souls heroic" (I, l. 735).

The extensive use of imagery inspired by the subject of death relates directly to the element of death in the narrative of the poem: there are references to those who died during the revolutionary period, to their "graves" (I, l. 495), to "rows of shot corpses, waiting for the end/ Of burial" (I, ll. 1205-1206), who have attained their "apocalypse of death" (I, l. 1209). The significance of these and similar references lies in the poet's stylistic manipulation of parallel themes and images: the 'death' of the patriots' hopes is seen magnified in the symbolic 'death' of Italy, while the literal, physical deaths of those who died in the cause for independence is seen in terms similar to those used to describe the symbolic 'death' of the nation.

The first part of Casa Guidi Windows has much to say concerning Art and the human soul, invariably with reference to death. Artistic creativity is seen as an activity of the human soul - a theme frequently found in Elizabeth's poetry, as has already been seen. "The artist's soul" and his or her "works" (I, l. 89) are seen as inextricably linked together; referring to the Tuscan sculptor, painter and architect Michel Agnolo Buonarotti (1475-1564) the poet describes his creative drive in terms of the motivation of his soul (I, l. 127). Mourning the demise of Italian vitality in the present age, the poet contrasts it with Buonarotti's

artistic integrity, which originated in his soul, and his rejection of worldliness for the spiritual fulfilment in his art:

So keep your stone, beseech you, for your part,
To cover up your grave-place and refer
The proper-titles; I live by my art (I, ll. 135-37).

Contrastingly, the dying Margheritone (1236-1313), is castigated for his petty jealousy of other artists (I, ll. 379-86).

Similar to Buonarotti, however, is the example of a number of other figures. It was an indication of the fiery spirits within the artists Buonarotti, Raffael (1483-1520) and Pergolese (1704-1736), that caused their:

Strong hearts (to) beat through stone or charged again
The paints with fire of souls electrical,
Or broke up heaven for music (I, ll. 182-84).

Regarding literature, the poet refers to Dante's spirit burning like lava (I, l. 606), while Music is seen as that which "delights the souls of men" (I, l. 308).

The positive function of the artist - and hence of the human soul, specifically the Italian soul, is related to the poet's whole didactic argument urging the Italians not to venerate the dead purely for their own sake, but to effect political change in this present age: poets should proclaim liberty rather than "croon the dead" (I, l. 167). In the same vein, in a movingly lyrical passage, the poet suggests that it would not have been sufficient for the Israelite singer Asaph merely to concentrate upon the music of the dead harpist Jubal, but to move beyond it to create new and greater artistic beauty:

If youthful Asaph were content at most
To draw from Jubal's grave, with listening eyes,
Traditionary music's floating ghost

Into the grass-grown silence, were it wise? (I, ll. 309-12).

The human soul, therefore, is both creative of and receptive to Art, while the need for spiritual vitality to be a part of all positive activity is seen to apply both to Art and to politics: artists and patriots must respond to the urgings of their inner souls, not to be content merely to venerate dead artists and heroes, but to strive themselves for greater things.

For the poet, much of the spiritual beauty of Florence lies in its art treasures, and these are invariably religious in theme, or depict spiritual entities, including the Madonna and Child of Giovanni Cimabue (1240-1300), portraying "angels" (I, l. 348), and "cherub-faces" (I, l. 360), while the monastic painter Angelico (1387-1455) is described as portraying in his art the vision of spiritual beings which he was granted. He:

> ... welcomed the sweet slow
> Inbreak of angels (whitening through the dim
> That he might paint them) (I, ll. 392-94).

The spiritual quality of the artistic essence is seen as an indication of spiritual survival: while Dante's bones lie in Ravenna (I, l. 616), the poet himself "sits in heaven" (I, l. 649).

Not only is the cultural beauty of Florence of spiritual origin, and an inspiration to the human spirit, but the physical beauty of Italy is also seen as having this spiritual significance. The beauty and glory of Vallombrosa filled "the cup of Milton's soul so to the brink" (I, l. 1156), and inspired the souls of pilgrims (I, l. 1164). The souls of north Europeans are moved by the beauty of the Italian landscape and art (I, l. 1173). This idea, again, is given a wider significance: in return for the 'spiritual' refreshment granted to northerners by Italy,

the poet hopes that the "souls" of the English will bless the Italians in their struggle for political freedom (I, l. 1198).

The poem suggests that the spirit can express itself through the physiognomy (I, l. 575), a notion that implies the essential individuality of the human spirit: its particular features are made manifest in the individuality of each human visage. The soul is also intuitive or perceptive (I, ll. 620-21), and fiery, dynamic and vital (I, ll. 943-44). Seeking a new hero to lead the nation to independence, the poet insists that the spiritual and moral dynamism, the pure integrity of such a figure, would imply that they were a "high soul" (I, l. 762), with an expansive "inner soul" (I, l. 794), one whose "soul" would be in direct communication with God (I, ll. 802-803). Such a leader would be assured of immortality (I, ll. 841-45, 848-49), and his achievements would cast those of his predecessors into shadow:

> ... when
> He sat down on the throne, he dispossessed
> The first graves of some glory (I, ll. 857-59).

The first part of Casa Guidi Windows has something too to say about the role or function of human souls who have attained their full spiritual existence: as the grave engulfs the human frame: "souls find place in Heaven" (I, l. 1214), and it is evident that these spirits are not drifting in a spiritual limbo, but have an active, intercessory role to fulfil between this world and immortal spheres; human prayers are borne:

> ... to the height where prayers arrive,
> When faithful spirits pray against a wrong (I, ll. 1199-1200).

The latter reference is ambiguous: the "faithful spirits" could be those believers in this sphere whose prayers ascend to God, as well

as those disembodied souls in the spiritual world who serve Him. This ambiguity, rather than introducing a sense of conflict between the earthly and spiritual worlds, or rather than revealing a sense of confusion or indistinctness on the part of the poet, serves to underline the immortal nature of the human soul: through the ambiguity of the lines, it is implied that either on this earth, the souls (the 'spiritual' aspect of individuals) yearning to God, or in heaven, the spirits of those who have died - either of these is in a position to pray or to intercede, because they are in fact synonymous. The human soul is, therefore, the immortal spirit.

The poem has a number of other references to, and images concerning, supernatural entities: throughout, God is seen as inscrutable, the poet wondering what the purposes of God can be, when He has allowed Italy to decline beneath Austrian oppression (I, ll. 70, 73, 121). The term "angel" is introduced with varying implications. The poet mocks the angels of what she regards as Catholic mythological superstition, including the "artist-angels" (I, l. 1008) who supposedly moraculously produced a picture of the Virgin, and the "cloud of angels" (I, l. 1013) who supposedly carried the home of the Holy Family from Bethlehem to Loreto. Elsewhere the term 'angel' has a different, more serious usage: the notion of people "knowing their own angel" (L. 600) appears to be another instance of the 'Christianised' 'spirit-guide' of the Spiritualists. Sometimes the angel-figure belongs even more closely to Christian mythology, as in the figure of "the judgement angel" (I, l. 805), and it is occasionally used in a straightforward simile: "Be henceforth prosperous as the angels are" (I, l. 724). Other supernatural entities and related references include that to Machiavel's vision of the woman "dressed out against the fear of death and hell" (I, l. 324), recalling the death of her husband in the plague (I, ll, 326-27), the reference to the Pope's soul (I, l. 972),

the term "nympholept" (I, l. 190), and the image of the Pope 'haunted' by the traditions of the Papcy:

> ... what ghosts of pale tradition, wreathed with hope
> 'Gainst wakeful thought, he had to entertain
> For heavenly visions (11, 982-84).

However, it is not through such images that we can hope to understand Elizabeth's thinking about the human soul in the first part of Casa Guidi Windows. These references and images are, of course, significant in indicating Elizabeth's continuing interest in the subject of death and immortality, especially in a poem with such a positive and worldly theme as this is. However, she does use the political theme to explore some of her thoughts about the nature of the soul. Parallelling the 'death' of Italy with the sense of bereavement experienced at the martyrdom of its patriots, Elizabeth argues that it should be the aim of the human soul to engage in positive activity, to venerate the dead, but to move on to excel them in improving conditions in this world. Similarly, Art is an expression of the creative positivism of the soul. Only through dynamic activity - for example, of political or social consciousness, or of artistic appreciation and creativity - can the soul express itself fully, asserting that part of human nature which is immortal, and which is united with the inscrutable God of conventional Christianity, after death.

The second part of Casa Guidi Windows develops much of the relevant symbolism introduced in Part One, as well as exploring further the theme of Italian political events - this time during the years 1848-9. Here again, the poet introduces the concept of a dying Italy - dying among the ruins of her ancient civilisation, but dying too as an independent nation crushed by the Grand Duke of Tuscany, the Papacy and Austria. Italy is "dying century to century" (II, l. 61); among her people burn "many

corpse-lights of experience" (II, l. 71), and the poet cries:

Had all the death-piles of the ancient years
Flared up in vain before me? (II, ll. 76-77).

Italy is therefore haunted by the "ghosts of patriots" (II, l. 82), whose tombs are referred to in an Italy littered with graves (II, ll. 724-25). The poet refers too to the 'resurrection' in Tuscany of the 'dead' monarchical order (II, ll. 332-33). However, her argument is that whereas a false resurrection of this kind has been achieved through despotism and force, it is nevertheless universally true that nations, populaces, have a genuine immortality: "peoples will not die" (II, l. 341).

As in Part One of the poem, this death-imagery used to describe the demise of liberal aspirations provides an appropriate stylistic parallism with the literal deaths of the Italian patriots (II, ll. 172-73), and the poet is concerned to convey a sense of the wastefulness, the horror, the seriousness of physical death:

... when we see
The brown skulls grin at death in churchyards bleak,
We do not cry 'This Yorick is too light',
For death grows deathlier with that mouth he makes (II, ll. 188-191).

There are other grisly references to the fallen patriots, to "Dying men and horses, and the wave/ Blood-bubbling" (II, ll. 404-5), to the "patriot Dead" (II, l. 657), "these Dead" (II, l. 663) who are "Dead for Italia" (II, l. 671), and now lie in their "graves" (II, ll. 674, 677).

Apart from these general references to literal physical death during the upheavals in Italy, there are specific references to the deaths of notable individuals, including Count Pellegrino, 'Rossi' (1787-1848), the assassinated Papal Prime Minister, who "died silent near where Caesar died" (II, l. 545), and, indeed, to Caesar's own assassination:

... a man is killed

Near Pompey's statue, and the daggers strike

At unawares i' the throat (II, ll. 553-55).

Similarly, there is a long description of the death of Garibaldi's wife (5) (II, ll. 678-94), which contain some evocative descriptive lines, despite the rather extreme nature of the symbolism and the morbidity of the associations:

... and now, the seaweeds fit

Her body, like a proper shroud and coif,

And murmurously the ebbing waters grit

The little pebbles while she lies interred

In the sea-sand (II, ll. 685-89).

The following description of the death of the patriot king of Sardinia, Charles Albert (6) is similarly designed to invoke the reader's sympathy for the death of a specific, individual patriot killed during the political unrest (II, ll. 694-723).

One related image which is frequently used in Part Two of Casa Guidi Windows is the wreath. Again, its introduction is a skilful stylistic device on the part of the poet, because the wreath is at the same time a symbol of funeral mourning, of remembrance, and of victorious rejoicing. Thus the poet refers to "the future wreath" (II, l. 177) of the forthcoming slaughter to occur in Italy, to the "nosegays, wreaths and kerchiefs" (II, l. 267) tossed by the crowds rallying in support of the Duke of Tuscany before he re-asserted his suppressive autocracy, and to "the garlands for the graves" (II, l. 729), which is the only 'wreath' won by an Italy crushed again beneath the reactionary despotism of Austria. The success of the image therefore lies in its applicability on a number of different levels: as an emblem of mourning it is relevant to the extinction of Italian liberal aspirations, to the consequent

'death' of the personification, Italia, and to the literal physical deaths of slaughtered patriots. As an emblem of rejoicing, on the other hand, it relates to the actual festivity of the Tuscans honouring their Duke, their celebration of relief from oppression and, symbolically, the sumptuous declaration of the liberated persona of the nation. The recurring wreath-symbol in the poem is therefore of ambiguous relevance.

The poem introduces the terms 'soul' and 'spirit' with various shades of meaning and significance. The term "spirit" is used to imply the inner being or conscious self (II, l. 15), and to convey a sense of the essence, the spiritually aware part of the individual, as in the following lines:

> ... some swooning spirit who, last year,
> Lost breath and heart in these church-stifled places (II, ll. 512-13).

The term 'soul' occurs more frequently; the poet often refers to her "soul" when speaking of her personality or self - perhaps her poetic or artistic self (II, ll. 63, 97, 193, 748). Similarly, when referring to north European or British individuals, the poet describes them as "Saxon souls" (II, l. 236), the Italians being "Italian souls" (II, l. 420), while "soul" is very frequently used to imply inner self or being, essence, awareness or identity, in a very general sense (II, ll. 377, 460, 474, 633, 769). Sometimes "soul" implies a more overtly moral quality, akin to inner purity or goodness; in this sense, the poet refers to the lack of "soul-conviction" in the Italians' lack of positive, moral commitment to the cause of freedom, contrasting this with the virtuous "soul" of patriot and republican, Guiseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) (II, l. 538), and the "prophet-soul" of Michel Angelo (II, l. 563). In the sense of the human soul as the spiritual or moral essence of the individual, the poet asserts that "souls have inner lights" (II, l. 432). It seems, therefore,

that the terms 'spirit' and 'soul' are used in a very general sense by the poet to describe a number of intellectual, moral and spiritual qualities - as well as to imply identity itself. The supernatural entities mentioned in the poem - angels (II, ll. 473, 750), and cherubs (II, l. 782), are casual references without significant meaning from the point of view of present purposes. The direction of the poem, therefore, is loosely Christian. There are frequent references to God, and calls upon Him to aid Italy (II, ll. 421-4), rebukes directed in the name of God against the Catholic Church (II, ll. 484-576), and against other nations reluctant to aid the Italian cause (II, ll. 628-56). In the same vein, one finds imagery relating to the person of Christ; stylistically the parallel is drawn between Christ, the Church's champion, who suffered cruelly, and the Italian people, whose sufferings are, paradoxically, accentuated by the Church, aiming to assist in subjecting the people beneath despotic autocracy (II, ll. 449-52, 479-83). The resolution towards which the poet looks is a Christian one. The poet, declaring "We will trust God" (II, l. 776), looks hopefully towards the new world of her young son's generation, a new order of rebirth, peace, purity, harmony and fertility (II, ll. 742-80). In this respect, the apocalyptic ending of Casa Guidi Windows anticipates the closing section of Aurora Leigh which, as will be seen in Chapter Seven, concludes in a similar vein.

The poem also contains two passages of relevance to Elizabeth's thinking with regard to spiritual entities. Speaking of the commercial world and the luxurious carpets which it produces, the poet, in a simile, describes the pacing of people upon these carpets as being "Inaudible like spirits" (II, l. 605). In view of the spirit-raps and messages reputedly produced in spiritualist circles, however, it would seem that Elizabeth's concept of the 'inaudibility' of spirits is less a literal reference to the events which occurred in her own experience of Spiritualism, than a poetic device designed to convey a sense of the

ethereal, ghostly quality of spiritual entities. More significant is the reference to the mediumship of the Witch of Endor who, at the request of Saul, 'raised' the spirit of the prophet Samuel (see Chapter One). The poet states, likening the Tuscans' desperate military situation in the face of the might of Austria, to the situation of Saul before the Battle of Gilboa, when he went to consult the spirit of Samuel:

> Ye called up ghosts, believing they were slack
> To follow any voice from Gilboa's tents ...
> Here's Samuel! - and, so, Grand-dukes come back (II, ll. 325-27).

These lines apart, however, the significance of Part Two of Casa Guidi Windows from the point of view of Elizabeth's interest in Spiritualism, lies in her continuing usage of death, mourning and funereal imagery in a poem concerned with the physical deaths of Italian patriots during the 1840's, the 'death' of their liberal aspirations and of the nation as a whole, her interest in the implication of terms such as 'spirit' and 'soul', and her Christian hope for the 'resurrection' of Italy under a new age.

Poems before Congress (1860) reflected Elizabeth's continuing interest in Italian politics, and for this reason the volume will be considered here, although its publication was in fact preceded by that of Aurora Leigh, in 1857.

Poems before Congress reveals Elizabeth's political bias with regard to Italian affairs at its most naive and idealistic: The Dance, for example, is a naive presentation of the French soldiers who were, after all, in occupation of Italy, while A Court Lady is an anti-pacifist glorification of those who died for freedom; Napoleon III in Italy is an idealistic example of hero-worship, while Christmas Gifts is a naive and mawkish poem which rather blasphemously relates Napoleon's invasion of Italy to Christ's mission to earth.

However, many of these peoms re-echo relevant thematic and symbolic preoccupations found in Casa Guidi Windows. Napoleon III in Italy, for example, presents the familiar image of Italy 'dying' if Napoleon will not succour her (ll. 105, 110). Italy, the poem asserts, would then be in her grave (ll.111-26, 139-44), with "a grave-stone under her head" (l. 115). This symbolic description of the 'dead' Italy is, as in Casa Guidi Windows, parallelled by the literal description of physical death, and the concept of the 'dead' hopes of the Italian patriots. With the arrival of Napoleon III in Italy, it is possible that the "dust" of the dead patriots will be resurrected:

> ... Where heroes left their dust as seed
> Sure to emerge one day? (ll. 150-51).

and there is a reference to the dead patriots rising "out of the dust where they ground them" (l. 205). It is also implied that the dead heroes can in some way influence the living who are inspired by their example (ll. 191-7). Similarly, there are descriptions of actual physical bloodshed (ll. 243-4), while yet another form of 'death-imagery' in the poem is the description of Napoleon Bonaparte's grave:

> They took the old regalia out
> From an open grave that day;
> From a grave that would not close,
> Where the first Napoleon lay
> Expectant, in repose ... (ll. 14-18).

The implication here is that the military prestige of Bonaparte is renewed in Napoleon III's entry into Italy (7).

The poet therefore shows skill in the handling of death-imagery in the poem: first, the literal physical deaths of heroes is related to the 'death' of liberalism in Italy; second, the 'resurrection' of Italian hopes is symbolised in the metaphorical rising of the dead

patriots from their graves to inspire the living, in the renewal of French military glory under Napoleon III, and his restoration of the remains of the great hero Napoleon Bonaparte to the magnificence of his stately mausoleum. In addition, it is suggested that the resurrector Napoleon III, the servant of God (ll. 85-94) will, in turn, be remembered when he, too, is dead (ll. 410-16). Finally, the idea of the symbolic rising of the dead is parallelled by the concept of the immortality of the soul. The poet describes in some effectively evocative lines:

> Should we hear the ghosts
> Thrill through ruined aisle and arch,
> Throb along the frescoed wall,
> Whisper an oath by that divine
> They left in picture, book and stone,
> That Italy is not dead at all? (ll. 154-59);

so, too, the human soul is eternal - either literally, or in the sense that the individual is survived by his or her accomplishments (for instance, political achievements) in this world:

> Should for the spirits at large
> Who passed for the dead this spring,
> Whose living glory is sure (ll. 233-35).

Elsewhere there is an indication of the literal survival of the human soul:

> The soul of a high intent, be it known,
> Can die no more than any soul
> Which God keeps by Him under the throne (ll. 404-406).

However, there is no extended description of the nature of condition of the 'soul' or 'spirit'. While it is asserted that each man's body has a soul (l. 190), and that this soul is related to religious

or spiritual awareness (ll. 214,325), the "spirit" elsewhere is seen purely as the essence of centrality, the individuality or active consciousness (l. 333).

There are other parallels to the imagery and themes of Casa Guidi Windows in Poems before Congress. A Court Lady describes the Lady as a personification of Italy (l. 20), similar to the Cybele and Juliet of Casa Guidi Windows. This Lady is literally observing the various deaths of young Italian soldiers (ll. 20, 30, 48) as symbolically Italy is watching the slaughter of her native sons. Here, dying is not seen as a finality, however, for the "passing soul" of one soldier (l. 21) is released from his body, while death for another signifies freedom (l. 50), a spiritual freedom attained when death destroyed the soldier fighting for political freedom. Similarly A Tale of Villafranca describes the "mourning" of Florence (l. 7), lamenting the 'death' of Italian hopes after the Peace of Villafranca (8), while the assertion that "Men's souls are narrow" (l. 69) is an assertion of the idea stated in Casa Guidi Windows that the failure of Italian liberalism was due to the spiritual deprivation of the people who lacked "soul-conviction". This poem, written in the style of a mother's monologue to her child, conveys an impression of ballad-form where, again, a story, by apparently passing into folk-lore, has preserved something of its didactic function. In this case, what has been preserved is the mother's argument that the Peace has destroyed Italian liberal aspirations.

Again, Italy and the World presents the parallel of the Italian dead awaiting resurrection, with the expectation of national hopes for the raising of liberal aspirations, a device already encountered in Casa Guidi Windows. Here the image of resurrection approaches the grotesque in its extended application by the poet:

So many graves reserved by God, in a
Day of Judgement, you seemed to know,
To open and let out the resurrection (ll. 3-5).

Referring to "martyrs dead and gone" (l. 9) the poet describes the gruesome rising of interred patriots:

The trumpet sounded, the graves were open.
Life and life and life! agrope in
The dusk of death, warm hands, stretched out
For swords, proved more life still to hope in,
Beyond and behind. Arise with a shout,
Nation of Italy, slain and buried (ll. 25-30).

The poet's aim is to convey the notion that Italy has risen "to the final restitution" (l. 35), through the symbolic resurrection of her dead, but the appropriateness of the latter image (in view of the literal deaths of those who aimed to free Italy) is largely off-set by the revolting idea of raised corpses fighting for their fatherland.

An August Voice, an anti-ducal poem, is full of references to the deaths of Italian patriots (ll. 35, 62, 71, 78-79, 107); in the same way Christmas Gifts is an anti-papal poem. The Pope is seen as having oppressed the "souls" of the people (ll. 4, 52), "souls" being clearly a reference to the spiritual or religious awareness of the individual here. Now, these spiritually-deprived individuals have only the Last Day to look towards (l. 30). The poem also refers to the nativity angels (l. 15), while its effectiveness as a whole is, again, undermined by the grotesqueness of the imagery. In a parallel of the magi bringing gifts to the Christ-child, Napoleon III's 'gift' to Italy is the blood of her patriots:

Then a king of the West said 'Good! -
I bring thee the gifts of the time;
Red, for the patriot's blood ... (ll. 37-39).

Two poems unrelated to the dominant Italian theme of Poems before Congress are A Curse for a Nation and The Curse, concerned with the slavery issue in America (9). A Curse for a Nation is written in the form of a dream in which an angel dictates to the poet the curse aimed at America (l. 1). The angel is not as serious an attempt to imply the presence of a 'spirit-guide' as has been observed elsewhere in Elizabeth's poetry, but the fact that it is an angel who speaks to the poet implies that the cause of freedom - specifically, the cause of the freedom of slaves - is an issue of spiritual significance, appealing to the moral or soulful awareness of white Americans. This idea of the slavery issue as a spiritual question is related to the general sense of moral responsibility in political and social affairs: the poet is "heavy-souled" for the sins of her own nation (l. 32). The notion of the spiritual significance of political matters does, however, relate to some of the themes in the Italian poems: the plight of the Italians resulted in their spiritual oppression, while for them to be successful in their cause, the poet asserts that they needed soulful conviction and motivation.

Finally, The Curse describes the similar oppression of the slaves' "souls" in their deprivation (l. 57), while asserting that it is part of the curse that America should be forced to observe the 'deaths' of other nations (ll. 78-81).

Poems before Congress, therefore, is a collection of rather naive poems which has little to reveal concerning Elizabeth's thinking about death. This one would expect in a volume of an essentially political nature. Nevertheless it is perhaps significant that many of these poems do concern death - the deaths of individuals, as well as of causes and movements, and that these themes are invariably conveyed by means of imagery and symbolism inspired by the subject of Death, in the poetry of one whose preoccupation with death, immortality and the

soul was a consistently pronounced feature of her work both in thematic and symbolic terms, as well as being one of the principal motivations of her religious experience and her general interest in spiritual issues.

Notes to Chapter Six

(1) Hiram Powers, the American sculptor (see Chapter One Note Twenty) finished his 'Greek Slave' in the mid-1840's, and the statue was shown at the Great Exhibition ih London in 1851, earning its sculptor a considerable reputation. Gardner B. Taplin, however, criticises it adversely:

> The face is without expression, the modelling is lean and monotonous, much of the anatomy is incorrect, and the sculptor devoted too much attention to the accessories of the chains and shackles and the embroidery of the cloth on the post upon which the right hand is resting (Taplin, p. 202).

However, the popularity of the work no doubt originated from its representation of the physical power, dignity and bodily beauty of the slave despite the fact that he was in bondage. Indeed, when Sam Osgood visited Powers' studio in Florence, he saw this statue and wrote of it, and Powers' 'Eve', that they both "soothe and charm you by their exquisite harmony instead of surprising you by any bold strokes" ('American Artists in Italy', Harper's New Monthly Magazine, XLI [August 1870] 420).

Interest in the statue would have been accentuated at a time when there was much interest in the abolitionist cause in America, especially as Powers was an American expatriot. Elizabeth Barrett Browning was a staunch supporter of the abolitionist cause (see Note Nine).

It would seem that an additional influence upon Powers' conception of the statue was the cause for Greek independence. His daughter Ellen Powers wrote:

> ... undoubtedly the Greek struggle for freedom gave

> him the inspiration to embody a conception that my mother said dated from his early youth when, musing one day on the border of a Vermont stream, the figure of the 'Greek Slave ' rose vision-like before his eyes, (Recollections of my Father, p. 83).

(2) Hugh Stuart Boyd (1781-1848) was a classical scholar and a neighbour of Elizabeth's family early in her life when the Barretts lived at Hope End, Herefordshire, Boyd being resident in Great Malvern. He briefly attended Pembroke College, Cambridge, after 1799, but pursued most of his classical studies privately. He became totally blind at the age of thirty. His friendship with Elizabeth developed from their mutual classical interests; Elizabeth frequently read Greek to Boyd, while he encouraged her writing and her individuality, strongly criticisng Mr. Barrett's autocratic domestic organisation. In later years, however, they grew apart as Elizabeth came to realise Boyd's narrow scholarship and outlook, and developed her own wider interests in politics and French fiction. Boyd became increasingly eccentric, and although they continued to correspond, their relationship declined in intimacy. Boyd approved of Elizabeth's marriage to Browning, and it was to Boyd's London home that she went immediately after the wedding ceremony. Boyd's published works included translations of Greek poetry and of theological writings in Greek, anti-Catholic and other ecclesiastical and theological works, and two volumes of poetry.

(3) The child of the poem was Alice Cottrell, the fifteen month-old daughter of Count Henry and Sophia Cottrell, friends of the Brownings at Florence. Alice Cottrell died in November 1849, and her father was so distressed that Browning had to attend to the details of the funeral. Elizabeth wrote this poem about two weeks later. She was very distantly related by marriage to the

Countess, through her uncle Samuel Barrett's second wife, Ann Eliza Gordon (Taplin, p. 211).

Extraordinary events of a spiritualistic significance reputedly attended the child's death, as related in Chapter Three.

(4) The title of the poem refers to the fact that Elizabeth observed the political events described in her poem from the windows of her Florentine home, Casa Guidi. The Brownings moved there in August, 1847. The house is situated in the Via Maggio, near the Piazza Santa Maria Novella, not far from the river Arno.

Elizabeth herself defended the title, and her own account of the affairs she witnessed, in her advertisement, thus: "The poem contains the impressions of the writer upon events in Tuscany of which she was a witness. 'From a window', the critic may demur. She bows to the objection in the very title of her work" ('Advertisement to the First Edition', Casa Guidi Windows).

She further acknowledged her observation of the events as an eye-witness, in the safety of her apartment, referring to the "Casa Guidi windows" in the poem itself, I, l. 471; II, ll. 28, 100, 287, 352, 426, 439, 742, 759.

(5) Anita Garibaldi was a beautiful Brazilian whom the Italians called 'Signora Rosa'. When the French army entered Italy to suppress the new Roman Republic, Garibaldi rose to oppose them. His wife rode beside him throughout the campaign, although she was pregnant, and subsequently suffered extreme hardship and deprivation. Some of Garibaldi's forces boarded ships bound for Venice, but were shipwrecked on the coast near Ravenna. The Austrians captured many of the 'rebels' and executed them while Garibaldi carried his wife to a peasant's cottage on the shore, where she died.

(6) Charles Albert was the only Italian prince to grant a constitution to his subjects in 1848. His good-will for the people appears to have been genuine and consistent. He achieved a number of initial successes over the Austrian army at Pastrengo, Verona and Santa Lucia, on behalf of the rebels, but these were followed by reverses at Custoza, and, finally, defeat at Navra in March, 1849. The king fought bravely during the battle but, when defeated, abdicated in favour of his son, Victor Emmanuel II, Duke of Savoy. Charles Albert went into exile in Portugal, and died that summer in Oporto. His body was then removed to Genoa, and magnificently entombed at the Superga.

(7) This allusion to the ashes of Bonaparte is a means of asserting the role of Napoleon III as an instrument of 'resurrection'. Louis Philippe's son brought Napoleon's ashes from St. Helena in 1840, and these were later permanently installed by Napoleon III in the mausoleum in the Hotel des Invalides.

The poet has thus conveyed the idea that Napoleon III, who 'restored' the ashes of the great Bonaparte, is also the hero who has renewed the military glory of France, and who will 'resurrect' the life and freedom of Italy.

(8) Villafranca di Verona, in Venetia, was the site of the signing of the Peace of Villafranca between Napoleon III and the Austrians, in 1859, after the battles of Magenta, Solferino and San Martino. The treaty united Lombardy and Piedmont, but left Venice to the Austrians, thereby frustrating the Italians' hopes for liberty. The Peace was therefore resented throughout Italy, and the poet here laments its frustrating effects.

(9) The target of this unit of two poems was mistaken as being England when they first appeared. Consequently they were

severely censured by The Athenaeum and other reviewers. Indeed, it seems strange that the poems, concerned with America and slavery, should have appeared in a volume otherwise exclusively concerned with Italian political affairs.

The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point, published in Poems (1850) also reveals Elizabeth's interest in the slavery issue. It is possible that Elizabeth was not unaffected by the fact that her great-grandfather, Edward Barrett, had been a planter and slave-owner in Jamaica (Taplin, pp. 1-2). It is a curious coincidence that the first wife of Browning's paternal grandfather, Robert Browning, was Margaret Tittle, who had been brought up in St. Kitts and Jamaica (Taplin, p. 139).

Chapter Seven: 'Aurora Leigh' (1856), and 'Last Poems' (1862)

Aurora Leigh is Elizabeth's longest single work, a highly ambitious piece, an epic introducing many issues important to her age. The work took several years to complete : by April 1853, only a quarter of it had been written, by the winter of 1853-4, less than a half. By the end of February 1856, a fair copy of the first five books was ready, while in May of that year she had completed the seventh book and was engaged in writing the eighth. The work, dedicated to Kenyon, was finally published on November 15, 1856.

Aurora Leigh is important because, in the Preface, Elizabeth described it as: "the most mature of my works, and the one into which my highest convictions upon life and Art have entered ('Preface' Aurora Leigh).

The work is also significant because it contains the most explicit reference to Spiritualism in the whole of Elizabeth's poetry, a reference to which she referred in her letters. This reference will be considered later. The work also contains a considerable amount of imagery drawn from the subject of death; in some books this preoccupation amounts to a somewhat obsessive interest upon the part of the poet. The poem also introduces a number of interesting discussions relating to Art and moralty, and these concerns, too, relate to the poet's thinking concerning human spirituality and the soul. This chapter will aim to explore Aurora Leigh book by book, considering these thematic subjects, and the symbolism relating to the subject of death, immortality and spirituality. Towards the end of the chapter is a consideration of Elizabeth's final volume of poetry, Last Poems (1862), published posthumously - based on a similar critical approach.

The first book of Aurora Leigh concerns Aurora's birth and early life in Italy, the deaths of her mother and father, her removal

to England to reside with a narrow-minded aunt, and her realisation of her poetic vocation. The book contains a number of good descriptive passages, including that concerning Aurora's aunt (Aurora Leigh, Book I, ll. 272-309), and those relating to the English countryside (I, ll. 578-614, 1068-1145). The latter is especially important for its consideration of the world as the creation of God (I, ll. 1080-81, 1135-38, 1141-45). The description of Aurora's early years was based partly upon Elizabeth's own life - for example, her role as a young heiress, and her practice of reading before sleeping at night - but also upon one of her favourite French novels, Madame de Staël's Corinne (1807), the heroine of which shared similar parentage and foreign circumstances of birth, with Aurora Leigh.

The theme of the first book concerns Aurora's gradual spiritual development, her awakening sense of earthly beauty, and her destiny as a poet, through which she expresses her unity with God, the ultimate creator of all, including the poetic impulses of artists. This theme is a more explicit expression of an idea which, as the previous chapters have shown, is frequently considered in Elizabeth's poetry predating Aurora Leigh.

Physical death plays an important part in the awakening of Aurora's consciousness. Following the death of her mother (I, ll. 30-35), Aurora becomes obsessed with her and her portrait (I, ll. 127-175) which, to the child over-awed by the whole subject of death, created the impression that it could convey a sense of all moods, feelings, and sensations, and of presenting itself in a variety of forms, including a number of supernatural entities: "Ghost, fiend, and angel, fairy, witch, and sprite" (I, l. 154). Similarly, when Aurora's father dies later (I, ll. 210-211), the girl is again morbidly obsessed with his death, believing that:

There seemed more true life in my father's grave
Than in all England (I, ll. 375-76).

To Aurora's developing mind, life and death are totally incongruous, and she wrestles with this problem:

The incoherencies of change and death
Are represented fully, mixed and merged,
In the smooth fair mystery of perpetual Life (I, ll. 171-73).

However, she finds a consolation in the face of death and bereavement, in conventional Christian terms. She believes in the omniscient and all-knowing nature of God (I, l. 191), and therefore in the certain entry of the human soul into God's Kingdom. Aurora's father's firm transcendent belief was in Love, and it was while asserting that belief to her that he died (I, ll. 211-13). Aurora, therefore, believes in "that holy heaven/ to which my father went" (I, ll. 248-49) and contrasts the low skies of England with her belief in "God's celestial crystals" (I, l. 265).

Aurora thus finds a resolution of the problem of death in God, and in Christian doctrines of immortality. This sense of God's presence plays an important role too in her spiritual development as a creative artist. Aurora attains her creative status through an intimate <u>spiritual</u> association with God's creation. She spends her days "hid with God/ among his mountains" (I, ll. 204-205), where the natural world too assumes a spiritual quality:

... we had books among the hills.
Strong words of counselling <u>souls</u> confederate
With vocal pines and waters (I, ll. 187-89; my emphasis).

Aurora's artistic transcendence, involving a spiritual union akin to the Wordsworthian notion of pantheistic and Christian elements fused

directly contrasts with the narrow, lifeless institutional religion of her austere aunt, with whom she goes to live following her father's death. Her aunt's concept of heaven and of the ultimate spiritual state is of a place from which God's saints look austerely down upon this world, instilling fear into erring mankind (I, ll. 366-68). Aurora declares that she would literally rather be dead, than live beneath her aunt's cold authority:

> 'Twas natural to like to get away
> As far as dead folk can: and then indeed
> Some people make no trouble when they die (I, ll. 506-508).

In contrast with Aunt Leigh's cold, narrow view of human spirituality and the hereafter, Aurora's developing belief is in the transcendent nature of the human soul. To her, the soul is the essence of the individual (I, ll. 38, 293, 341) and it is also the active or vital impulse within the individual (I, ll. 707, 740). The soul is appreciative of beauty, for it loves music and poetry (I, ll. 419, 850-54). To Aurora, the poetic vocation is a divine one, for the poet expresses through the medium of his or her art an innermost conviction of the spiritual creativity of the artistic consciousness (I, ll. 855-80). The poet's spiritual vision is of the presence of God in all things. It is the poet, apart from all other individuals, who proclaims:

> ... This is soul,
> This is life, this word is being said in heaven,
> Here's God down on us! (I, ll. 874-76).

Aurora's poetic theory is thus steeped in Romanticism, owing much to Wordsworthian and Coleridgean beliefs in the spiritual significance of the artist engaged in the creative act. To Aurora, poets are like angels (I, l. 868). They have "a special revelation" (I, l. 906), and their poetry is of so divine a nature that it is:

As if one came back from the dead and spoke,
With eyes too happy, a familiar thing
Become divine i' the utterance! (I, ll. 908-10).

The poet stands in a unique relationship with the spiritual world:

The palpitating angel in his flesh
Thrills inly with consenting fellowship
To those innumerous spirits who sunthemselves
Outside of time (I, ll. 912-15).

It is clear, here, that Aurora's concept of the poetic role is idealistic and totally lacking in objective self-criticism. One should therefore be cautious in equating Aurora's view here with Elizabeth's belief in the significance of the poet's activity. It should be remembered that Aurora's theory is the product of adolescent awakening wrestling against Aunt Leigh's puritanical autocracy; the girl herself acknowledges that some verse is produced by "souls" giving vent through poetry to an uninspired (poetically speaking) mental vitality, to a morbid desire to record laboriously, in verse, life's woes, and to a youthful enthusiasm which gives way to the practicalities of mature adulthood (I, ll. 943-70). It is such poetic ecstasy, unrelated to self-criticism and analysis, which frequently results, Aurora declares, in the imitativeness of juvenilia. Here she herself was guilty, for in her early verse she "made the living answer for the dead" (I, l. 975). Her chief influence in this respect, she declares, was "Keats's soul" (I, l. 1003), which she describes as a "strong, excepted soul" (I, l.1010), unusual for the originality of his early poetry in a field where most young poets, including herself, produce imatitive verse, lacking the mature perfection of the poet's spiritual transcendence. These imitators:

... have not settled long and deep enough
In trance, to attain to clairvoyance, - and still
The memory mixes with the vision, spoils,
And works it turbid (I, ll. 1016-19).

Nevertheless, imitative juvenilia though it may have been, as Aurora asserts, that poetic creativity is an expression of the individual's inner soul (I, l. 1032). Her aunt was disturbed to see her niece's soul "agaze in my eyes" (I, l. 1031). Aunt Leigh's attitude was that:

... souls were dangerous things to carry straight
Through all the spilt saltpetre of the world (I, ll. 1034-35),

implying that the soul could act as a spark which might ignite the gunpowder of dangerous enthusiasms lurking beneath the surface of society. However, while describing her continuing poetic activity as her "soul... singing at a work apart/ behind the wall of sense" (I, ll. 1053-54), Aurora declares that her creative writing, together with her aunt's instruction in more practical matters, united her soul to her body by "rounding to the spheric soul the thin/ pined body" (I, ll. 1061-62).

Apart from this poetic function of the soul, the first book of Aurora Leigh has much to say directly regarding the soul's relationship with God. Implying that many "feebler souls" (I, l. 470) would have expired within the confines of Aunt Leigh's narrow educational aims for her niece, Aurora implies that her survival in these circumstances was entirely due to her soul's spiritual awareness of God's presence. She:

had relations in the Unseen, and drew
The elemental nutrient and heat
From nature, as earth feels the sun at nights,
Or as a babe sucks surely in the dark.
I kept the life thrust on me, on the outside
Of the inner life with all its ample room

For heart and lungs, for will and intellect,
Inviolable by conventions. God,
I thank thee for that grace of thine! (I, ll. 473-81).

It was Aurora's spiritual aspiration that marked her apart from her political, philanthropic cousin, Romney Leigh. Aurora asserts, perhaps rather self-righteously:

Always Romney Leigh
Was looking for the worms, I for the gods (I, ll. 551-52),

but it should be remembered that Aurora's defensive insistence upon her spiritual motivation occurred at a time when she was being stifled by her aunt's autocratic attitude towards her. As she also declares:

... I lost breath in my soul sometimes,
And cried 'God save me if there's any God',
But, even so, God saved me; and, being dashed
From error on to error, every turn
Still brought me nearer to the central truth (I, ll. 796-800).

For Aurora's spirituality, far from being a facet of her own sublime nature, is, she insists, a mark of the spiritually educative processes to which God submitted her (I, ll. 815-32). Declaring that Man's "spirit-insight" (I, l. 819) is "dulled and crossed by his sensations" (I, ll. 819-20), she describes how the human awakening sense of sin and guilt is accompanied by an increasing spiritual awareness and intuition both of God's presence and of the after-life:

For such dumb notions of imperfect life
Are oracles of vital Deity
Attesting the Hereafter (I, ll. 822-24).

The human soul, therefore, rather than being "a clean white paper" (I, l. 825) is like an ancient prophetic scroll defiled by the later

inscriptions of corrupt ecclesiastics writing upon it (I, ll. 826-32).

The first book of Aurora Leigh also discusses the role of the natural world in the spiritual education of the human individual, apart from the influence it has specifically upon the poet. Referring to the beauty of Nature, Aurora describes how:

> ... With a gradual step,
> A stir among the leaves, a breath, a ray,
> It came in softly, while the angels made
> A place for it beside me (I, ll. 651-54).

The reference to the angels here in interesting because it implies the essentially spiritual quality of Aurora's education by Nature, suggests the presence of supernatural beings concerned in human affairs, and therefore stresses the fundamental unity between this world and its Creator. This union between the pantheistic and the Christian, already noted as a feature of the argument of this book, is asserted too in the following evocative and lyrical lines:

> I,... opened wide
> The window and my soul, and let the airs
> And out-door sights sweep gradual gospels in,
> Regenerating what I was (I, ll. 663-66; my emphasis).

Finally, there are a number of related images in this first book which draw their symbolism from the subject of death and spiritual activity. First, the poet describes how Aurora's father, following his wife's death, became less practical in his considerations, and taught his daughter the supreme importance of Love. The image used by the poet to describe the father's renunciation of practical matters for a deeper sense of urgency regarding the spiritual, and Love, the image used concerns - significantly - the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

After being raised, Lazarus lost his intense appreciation of the practicalities of life, and his awareness of the relations of things, through having gained an intimation of God's view of the world. So, too, Aurora's father, after being forced to consider deep spiritual matters after his wife's death, returns to ordinary life still affected by his transcendent contemplations, and determined to convey these important conclusions to his daughter:

> My father, who through Love had suddenly
> Thrown off the old conventions, broken loose
> From chin-bands of the soul, like Lazarus,
> Yet had no time to talk and walk
> Or grow anew familiar with the sun ...
> My father taught me what he had learnt the best
> Before he died and left me, - grief and love (I, ll. 176-86).

The relevance of this image lies in the introduction of the Lazarus-symbol at a time when the poet is describing her mother's death, her father's 'resurrection' from despair following her death, and, finally, his own death.

Later, Aurora describes in similar terms her own spiritual development, her struggle from the darkness of her aunt's upbringing of her towards the light of her own spiritual and intellectual awareness:

> ...I did not die. But slowly, as one in swoon,
> To whom life creeps back in the form of death,
> With a sense of separation, a blind pain
> Of blank obstruction ...
> I woke, rose up ... (I, ll. 559-65).

Here, the stylistic effectiveness of the image lies in the relationship which it implies exists between death and 'resurrected life', and between the darkness, narrowness and blindness of a superficial

upbringing and the light, freedom, and transcendence of originality, and spontaneity. The image is also effective in its concern with death because, just before this point in the poem, Aurora describes how she was expected literally to die in England, away from her Italian origins (I, ll. 495-98).

This image, in turn, relates to a later simile in which Aurora likens her escape from her aunt's claustrophobic home to revel in the nearby countryside, to the idea of the soul being unleashed from the body:

> ... and escape
> As a soul from the body, out of doors,
> Glide through the shrubberies (I, ll. 693-95).

This simile is appropriate because it re-echoes the theme found throughout the book, the notion that spiritual enlightenment can be attained through an association with beauty - especially with the beauty of the natural world. Conversely, it recalls the Lazarus image and implies that, for spiritual vision to be achieved, the individual must become disassociated from this life, this world. Aurora's father was bereaved, and entered into spiritual speculation far removed from practical living; now, Aurora herself must obtain transcendence through a process likened to the soul's disembodiment from its 'cage', the flesh. Moreover, the simile is followed shortly by the death of Aurora's father (I, ll. 730-33). Finally, its effectiveness lies in its fulfilment in symbolic terms of Aurora's belief that it would be better to die than to live beneath her aunt's stifling authority (I, ll. 506-508); here, in her 'escape' from her aunt's house, Aurora's experience is likened to the soul's escape from the body - which supposedly, of course, occurs at the moment of death.

Another relevant image is introduced in Aurora's discussion of the moral aspect of literature. She describes how evil personages in

fiction can appear to transcend morality through the sheer vigour of their characters, or through the writer's imaginative power:

> For the wicked there
> Are winged like angels; every knife that strikes
> Is edged from elemental fire to assail
> A spiritual life (I, ll. 750-53).

The wicked are "winged like angels" because their amoral transcendence through powerful imaginative handling on the part of their creator, reflects the literal power of angels to fly. On the other hand, the poet cautiously adds, moral characters can affect readers by offering them their good examples:

> In the book-world, true,
> There's no lack, neither, of God's saints and kings,
> That shake the ashes of the grave aside
> From their calm locks and undiscomfited
> Look steadfast truths against Time's changing mask (I, ll. 757-61).

In the first book of Aurora Leigh, therefore, the dominant theme is Aurora's spiritual, intellectual and artistic development, a process of the soul inspired by pantheistic ecstacy and by the Christian vision. Aurora is significantly affected too by the deaths of her parents, which reinforce her general spiritual thinking. The poet makes use of imagery related to the subjects of death, resurrection and supernatural entities, in a book concerned with the general theme of the maturing and awakening of the immortal human spirit.

The second book of the poem describes Aurora's rejection of the marriage proposal made to her by her cousin, Romney Leigh, her aunt's subsequent anger with her, the aunt's death, Aurora's rejection of financial assistance from Romney, and her departure to London to

continue her life as a writer.

The book contains a number of good descriptive passages such as the opening account of Aurora's walk on the morning of her birthday (II, ll. 18-26) characterised by its stylistic compactness and conciseness, and the scenic description on the morning of Aunt Leigh's death (II, ll. 899-910). The closing lines, too, describing in sea-imagery the parting of Aurora and Romney, are powerful and effective (II, ll. 1243-48). However, much of the book is tediously long-winded, including the circumlatory argument between Aurora and Romney, at the time of the marriage-proposal, and their later discussion of her aunt's will towards the end of the book. Again, Aurora's rejection of her cousin's suit thematically resembles a similar incident in Madame de Staël's Corinne.

Aurora is now in her early maturity: "so strong, so sure of God!" (II, l. 13). Her spiritual idealism is later expressed in her conversation with Romney, when she insists on the necessity of total faith in God (II, ll. 283-87). Her spiritual conviction is significantly accompanied by her strong sense of her poetic vocation. She is aware that poets are only recognised after their deaths:

> The worthiest poets have remained uncrowned
> Till death has bleached their foreheads to the bone (II, ll. 28-29).

This idea is re-echoed later in the words of the practical Romney, who declares that the dead are a burden to the living:

> The civiliser's spade grinds horribly
> On dead men's bones, and cannot turn up soil
> That's otherwise than fetid (II, ll. 265-67).

However, Aurora is dedicated to the 'ivy wreath' of poetry that she plaits for herself (II, ll. 46-50), although aware of the significance of this plant as a covering of the graves of the dead (II, l. 51). It

is precisely her 'selfless' dedication to the ethereal, aesthetic values of Art, that causes her to conflict with the socially-committed philanthropist Romney (1) when he proposes marriage to her. Romney has no time for women poets (II, ll. 91-96), asserting that Man requires great art, and not the second-rate variety which is all that women, in his view, are capable of producing (II, ll. 130-172). It is Romney's belief that women should not try to be poets, but mothers, wives: "Sublime Madonnas, and enduring saints!" (II, l. 223). Romney summarises his thinking concerning the woman artist in a significant image, when he refers to Aurora's faith in her female poetic creativity as a "death-bed" (I, l. 180).

Romney proposes marriage, but his idea of 'love' is totally unromantic, based on a sense of service, duty and usefulness (II, ll. 423-25). Aurora rejects him:

> ... What you love
> Is not a woman, Romney, but a cause:
> You want a helpmate, not a mistress, sir,
> A wife to help your ends, - in her no end.
> Your cause is noble, your ends excellent,
> But I ...
> Do otherwise conceive of Love (II, ll. 400-406).

She later tells her aunt:

> I think he rather stooped to take me up
> For certain uses which he found to do
> For something called a wife (II, ll. 573-75)

Aurora's rejection of Romney's suit signifies a total clash of personality between the two: her poetic romanticism and private emotional idealism conflicting totally with Romney's practical, social activity and sense of public duty and philanthropy (2).

The two also disagree with regard to the whole question of death. Romney is oppressed by the state of the world, by God's apparent inactivity in it, and the whole "sense of all the graves" (II, l. 317). While agreeing with Aurora that God is omnipotent, he insists that death is nevertheless an issue of the utmost seriousness:

> ... A death-heat is
> The same as life-heat ...
> And in all nature is no death at all,
> As men account of death, so long as God
> Stands witnessing for life perpetually,
> By being just God. That's abstract truth, I know,
> Philosophy, or sympathy with God.
> But I, I sympathise with man, not God ...
> And when I stand beside a dying bed,
> 'Tis death to me (II, ll. 287-97).

Aurora, on the other hand, while agreeing that death is a highly personal subject (II, l. 439), is enthusiastic in her expressions of belief in human immortality and survival. She refers rather sentimentally to:

> ... God's Dead, who afford to walk in white
> Yet spread His glory (II, ll. 102-103).

Later she expresses her belief in the reality of human souls existing in heaven:

> How far and safe, God, dost thou keep thy saints
> When once gone from us! We may call against
> The lighted windows of thy fair June-heaven
> Where all the souls are happy, - and not one,
> Not even my father, looks from work or play
> To ask, 'Who is it that cries after us,
> Below there, in the dusk?' (II, ll. 736-42).

The latter statement is significant from the point of view of present purposes because at first sight it appears to be a refutation of the main belief of spiritualists - that is, that the disembodied dead can communicate with those in this world. However, it is important to realise that these words are uttered by Aurora at a desperate and lonely time following Romney's proposal, when she has nobody to turn to for advice apart from her unsympathetic aunt, and they express the character's longing for counsel from the only person who was ever close to her - her father, rather than being an objective denial of the notion that spirits can commune with this world. On the other hand, as far as Aurora's general belief in spiritual survival is concerned, the style of the poem, a first-person narrative, is important in conveying a sense, perhaps of the didactic and omniscient poet's personal beliefs. Because Aurora Leigh is a first person narrative, the beliefs and convictions of the narrator, Aurora, are an important indication of the poet's own belief in human immortality. In addition, although Aurora is an idealist, the poet is clearly aiming to present her as the fresh, sympathetic, romantic, individualistic heroine (whose belief in immortality is therefore rendered more valid), in contrast with the well-meaning but dull Romney, whose totally helpless attitude towards death is thus thrown into the whole context of his depressing pessimism. We therefore receive an impression that the poet is attempting to convey a conviction of the superior belief in the validity of human immortality through the idealistic, sympathetic positivism of Aurora, over and above the ominous sense of the menacing nature of death which Romney holds.

This preoccupation with the question of immortality in Book Two of Aurora Leigh is rendered more significant by the importance placed on literal physical death in the book. After Romney's proposal,

Aunt Leigh's death is crucial to the narrative because it is this which makes even more vulnerable Aurora's situation as an unmarried, penniless orphan who has rejected the heir, Romney (although she in fact inherits some of her aunt's money). There are frequent references to the likelihood of Aunt Leigh dying (II, ll. 592, 594-96, 638), to Aurora's death with regard to Romney (II, l. 659), to Aunt Leigh's actual death (II, ll. 925-32), and her funeral (II, ll. 963-69). The latter sequence is another example of the poet's ability, at times, to relate events concisely and compactly.

As before, the term 'soul' is used very loosely in this book. Aurora refers to her "soul" when speaking of her inner being, the sum total of her thoughts, feelings and intuitions, her individuality (II, ll. 246, 786, 948, 1185). Sometimes she uses the term when implying more the specifically moral or even religious sense of the individual (II, ll. 681-2). Romney, too, refers to his "soul" when speaking of his inner character or being (II, ll. 353, 826, 1046), and he, too, uses it in the more moral sense (II, ll. 281, 308). Sometimes "soul" refers simply to 'people' or 'individuals' (II, ll. 812, 1182), and Aurora also uses it in the sense of the poetic essence of the individual, that which is able to move others through the beauty of Art (II, ll. 479-80). It is in this sense that she speaks of poets understanding "That life develops from within" (II, l. 486), that is to say, that it is the inner private being which fashions the outer public manifestation of the individual, and here too that she refers to wom n's souls as perhaps aspiring, rather than creating (II, ll. 487-88).

There are a number of related images in Book Two, including the simile used to describe the maid's reaction to the discovery of Aunt Leigh's death:

Then, suddenly, a single ghastly shriek
Tore upward from the bottom of the house.
Like one who wakens in a graves and shrieks,
The still house seemed to shriek itself alive (II, ll. 911-14).

The grisly, spectral nature of the image is rooted firmly in the stock symbolism of the gothic novel, but the final line here contains a more original development on the part of the poet. Moreover, the appropriateness of this chilling simile lies in the fact that, while the house seems to be shrieking itself alive, Aunt Leigh, on the contrary, has entered the state of death and is now at rest, silent, rather than just having reawakened in her grave and cried out in distress. The image also emphasises the contrast between the peacefulness of death, and the frenzied existence of the living. Similarly appropriate because of its usage at this point - the death of Aunt Leigh - is the simile which describes Aurora's procedure to her aunt's death-chamber as if obeying a ghostly summons:

As if a ghost had drawn me at the point
Of a fiery finger through the uneven dark,
I went with reeling footsteps down the stair,
Nor asked a question (II, ll. 921-24).

These spectral similes relate well to the sombre, gloomy nature of the narrative at this point, and are a mark of the poet's skilful handling of some of her imagery.

Other miscellaneous references which should be noted for their relevance to themes of death and the supernatural include the fact that the theme of Aurora's Greek book concerned witchcraft and necromancy. Romney observes:

I saw at once the thing had witchcraft in't,
Whereof the reading calls up dangerous spirits:
I rather bring it to the witch (II, ll. 78-80).

Again, the poet refers to "the empty grave of Christ" (II, l. 165), to "the Judgement-Angel" (II, l. 382), to an "antique tomb" (II, l. 853), and the rhetorical notion of girls blushing and "wishing they were dead to save the shame" (II, l. 692) when their romantic hopes are detected by others. Aurora describes her aunt's thrusting away her niece's hands as if she had touched a dead snake (II, l. 726), and this curious image finds an echo later when Aurora exaggeratedly likens her aunt's clinging scrutiny of her to the asp at Cleopatra's breast (II, ll. 864-65). These rather inappropriate images relate to the theme only in so far as Aunt Leigh's own death is imminent. Other significant elements in Book Two include the ambivalence of Nature towards Man being likened to the notion of a friend's sword used by an enemy to slay one (II, ll. 758-59), the reference to Pedro I of Portugal's adulation of his dead wife, Inez de Castro, when he "crowned the bones/ Of his dead love" (II, ll. 811-12), the reference to the Roman dead (II, ll. 890-95) and to "Death's black dust" (II, l. 1157).

The third book of Aurora Leigh, set seven years later, describes Aurora achieving fame and success through pursuing her literary career in London, her encounter with Lady Waldemar (3), who loves Romney, and with Marian Erle, Romney's betrothed. Marian relates her history as an under-privileged child, rescued and restored by Romney. There are a number of major faults and implausibilities in the book: Lady Waldemar, whom contemporary critics castigated for the coarseness and vulgarity of her speeches (for example, III, ll. 414-20, 451-59),

takes the unlikely step of visiting Aurora, a potential rival, and confessing her love for Romney. The two women are, moreover, complete strangers. Regarding Marian Erle, she is a so-called underprivileged girl of working-class origin and, indeed, brutal upbringing, who somehow manages to conduct herself with unbelievable grace and etiquette, speaking with upper-class eloquence. As Gardner B. Taplin wrily observes: "It is inconceivable that such language ... could be natural for an illiterate child who had been raised by brutal, intoxicated parents in the country, far from all civilising influences" (Taplin, p. 322). For the character of Marian Erle, Elizabeth may have been influenced by Eugène Sue's Mystères de Paris (1842) which she had re-read prior to commencing Aurora Leigh. In Sue's novel, La Goualeuse is, like Marian, reared in underprivileged circumstances but manages to retain an angelic nature, while the hero, the gallant Grand-duc de Gerolstein, may partly have influenced Elizabeth's conceptualisation of Romney Leigh.

Book Three is not without merit, as is illustrated by the following evocative description of a foggy London evening:

> I... watched the sun
> On lurid morns or monstrous afternoons...
> Push out through fog with his dilated disk,
> And startle the slant roofs and chimney-pots
> With splashes of fierce colour. Or I saw
> Fog only, the great tawny weltering fog,
> Involve the passive city, strangle it
> Alive, and draw it off into the void,
> Spires, bridges, streets, and squares, as if a sponge
> Had wiped out London (III, ll. 170-83).

As a poet attaining her artistic maturity, Aurora retains her earlier trust in God's protective benevolence (III, ll. 163-64); she asserts too: "I do believe in love and God" (III, l. 478). Her spiritual faith is echoed later in Marian Erle's religious convictions; Marian believes that all the social ills of this world will change "in heaven" (III, l. 852). This notion is an expression of a more specific metaphysical attitude of Aurora, who appears rather negatively to glorify the concept of the spiritual life:

> The music soars within the little lark,
> And the lark soars. It is not thus with men.
> We do not make our places with our strains, -
> Content, while they rise, to remain behind
> Alone on earth instead of so in heaven (III, ll. 151-55).

Perhaps these lines should be seen less as a negative rejection of this world for that of ethereal religiosity, but an expression of belief in the validity of spiritual aspirations as opposed to the narrow vision of the pursuit of materialistic ends within society. However, elsewhere there is evidence on Marian's part of a desire to escape from this world and to seek comfort in death. Marian declares: "And now I am dead and safe" (III, l. 1087). This is when she faints after fleeing from her brutal parental home. However, again, these words are not the expression of an objectively conceived conclusion reached in a mood of dispassionate calm, but the sentiments of a desperate runaway escaping from violence and degradation. These feelings are the basis of Marian's association of her awakening in the calm and safety of the hospital, with the state of death itself:

> ... the place seemed new and strange as death.
> The white strait bed, with others strait and white,
> Like graves dug side by side at measured lengths (III, ll. 1106-1108).

There is no evidence, therefore, to suggest that, in Book Three, death and after-life are regarded as sufficient alternatives to life on earth, but rather that death becomes less a matter of fear and dread to the individual who faces extreme hardship and deprivation in this world. Nevertheless a firm belief in the reality of life - after-death is presented: Aurora refers to "the saints in heaven" (III, l. 1121), while Marian expresses definite belief in the reunion after death of those who have been close on earth - a notion rigorously propounded by spiritualists - when she refers to herself and Romney having "their meeting after death" (III, l. 1243).

There are numerous images related to the theme of death in Book Three of Aurora Leigh. Of these, the most important stylistically is probably the recurring symbol of the martyr-figure and the crucifixion. The book opens with an extended metaphor referring to the crucifixion of St. Peter (III, ll. 1-24). The metaphor argues that life 'crucifies' us in a way that is far worse than the literal physical crucifixion of martyrs. We are 'crucified' by social pressures and the intimidations of materialism regarding which God alone "can pluck us from that shameful cross" (III, l. 22). The image is violent, somewhat extreme: the references to St. Peter being "crucified head downward", (III, l. 6), and the parallelism of this to our situation 'crucified' as we are, according to the poet: "Head-downward on the cross-sticks of the world" (III, l. 21) - these references seem rather inappropriate as a means of describing the trials and tribulations of human life. The image recurs again later: Lady Waldemar, infatuated with Romney, declares that she is only jesting about his interpretation of her sudden philanthropy at its face value:

> As martyrs jest ... (if you read their lives),
> Upon the axe which kills them (III, ll. 614-15).

The image relating literature to the yew, with its deathly associations, is similarly curious. In contrast with the lively verdure of the ash, Aurora declares that the yew is less luxuriant, though it endures longer (III, ll. 266-9). She concludes:

> We'll plant more yews if possible, albeit
> We plant the graveyards with them (III, ll. 270-71).

At this point, Aurora is discussing her dissatisfaction with her poetic activity. She feels frustrated, unable to realise her full potential, successful only in the creation of 'popular' material, not full works of Art wrought with inspiration and dedication. Observing:

> I played at art, made thrusts with a toy-sword,
> Amused the lads and maidens (III, ll. 240-41),

she concludes:

> Heavens,
> I think I should be almost popular
> If this went on! (III, ll. 244-46).

The use of the ash and yew imagery, therefore, seems to have the following significance: that the lively ash symbolises the popular literature she is producing - dazzling, brilliant, popular in the fullest sense of the word. True Art, however, though less well received, is like the yew because it endures longer, attaining its own 'immortality'. Indeed, it assumes an eternal spiritual quality, becoming as it were 'sanctified' - just as the yew alone is "found worthy of the holy Christmas time" (III, l. 269). The notion of the yew as a symbol of death, therefore (III, l. 271), may be introduced by the poet here to imply that great Art, though of an eternal quality, is nevertheless indicative of death, transcience, mutability: the

work survives, the artist dies, perhaps - or possibly that the eternity of the work highlights and intensifies the ominous transcience of human life with which its permanence provides a merciless contrast. The yew-image here is therefore an effective symbol which is not weakened by its apparent complexity. Finally, it is significant to note that the poet chooses to symbolise ephemeral, 'popular' literature by the deciduous ash, while true, 'immortal' Art is symbolised by the eternally evergreen yew.

Less effective is the image used by the love-smitten Lady Waldemar, obsessed with Romney, describing herself as "a ghost, and sighing like Dido's" (III, l. 473). Dido killed herself when her lover Aeneas left her, but the image is inappropriate for the selfish, hypocritical and flippant Lady Waldemar except in so far as it serves to emphasise her self-delusion, her own inflated view of herself and her affected, rhetorical manner of speech.

In Book Three, too, the terms 'soul' and 'spirit' are rarely given a specific religious or spiritual significance. Probably the most important reference of this nature is that regarding "the recipient artist-soul" (III, l. 139), which the poet defines in terms of its singular nature, its positivism, its individuality, and its essential aspirant quality (III, ll. 140-41). There may well be an implication here of the spiritual nature of the creative aspect of the poet, but the "artist-soul" is, perhaps, more a term descriptive of the artistic motivation than an assertion that it is specifically the soul which creates works of art. Nevertheless the poet's use of the term here is an interesting one from the point of view of Elizabeth's interest in the subject of the soul. Elsewhere the term refers in a rather general sense to the inner being (III, ll. 283-89); sometimes it applies

more specifically to the religious or even moral sense of an individual (III, ll. 935, 1229), with an overtone of the inner spiritual being (III, l. 1007). At times, it is given an almost intellectual application, implying the mind (III, l. 1138), or the intellectual - even the sensitive - responsiveness (III, l. 1096). Occasionally its usage is entirely vague and ambiguous, as when Aurora refers to Marian's "soul" as if implying any of a number of facets - the being, the conscience, the moral or religious sense - even simply the goodness within her (III, l. 839). Again, Marian is described as having a "wretched soul" (III, l. 1042). Here, the poet's meaning may be to refer to her deprived person or oppressed individuality, her harrassed peace of mind, inner balance or tranquility. Whatever the poet does mean by the word 'soul', however, she insists that this soul has a 'spiritual' quality: the soul is "eternal" (III, l. 284), and its growth within the individual is organic, commencing early in childhood (III, ll. 328-29). It is the soul's growth that "makes the child grow" (III, l. 329), a notion implying not that we are born with a spiritual self of Divine origin, but that this develops within us and so promotes our growth towards maturity of personality and being. The term "spirit" is used far less frequently here, but as ambiguously, implying perhaps the mind or the personality -all which is not body (III, l. 1052).

Other miscellaneous references to supernatural entities include those to the angel speaking from Ararat (III, l. 48), angels (III, ll. 887-88), and seraphs (III, l. 1174). The poet refers too to the grim nature of death with regard to the wife killed by thunder (III, l. 93), to the dying pauper woman near Marian's home (III, l. 769), to Marian's mother's "death-bed" (III, l. 1060), and to the dead Caesar (III, l. 556).

Book Four continues Marian Erle's narrative, describing her reunion with Romney while she was nursing a dying girl, Lucy Gresham,

and her engagement to him, a union intended by Romney as a symbolic bridging of the gap between the aristocracy and the working class. At the wedding, however, Marian fails to appear, and sends word that her realisation of the gulf of social class between them would be a barrier to a happy marriage. Aurora suspects Lady Waldemar's hand in Marian's disappearance.

In some respects this is perhaps the weakest section of the poem discussed so far. The poet's description of the London poor attending the wedding is exaggerated and, at times, ridiculous. For example, she says:

> They clogged the streets, they oozed into the church
> In a dark slow stream, like blood (IV, ll. 553-54).

and:

> ... all the aisles, alive and black with heads
> Crawled slowly toward the altar from the street,
> As bruised snakes crawl and hiss out of a hole (IV, ll. 564-66),

and, referring to the faces of these working folk:

> ... 'twas as if you had stirred up hell
> To heave its lowest dreg-fiends uppermost
> In fiery swirls of slime (IV, ll. 587-89).

Such grossness of language can only be attributed to Elizabeth's total lack of knowledge of the London working-class. This mishandling of the poor is manifest not only in stylistic, but in thematic terms too: when Marian fails to arrive at the church, absurdly the working-class among the congregation rise up and cause a riot requiring police suppression. A further implausibility in Book Four is Aurora's failure to warn Romney in advance of Lady Waldemar's designs on him, and the possibility of her intervention in the wedding arrangements. In other respects too, the poet's failure is a stylistic as much as a

thematic one, such as in her usage of blank verse to present the flippant social gossip of the aristocrats at the wedding (IV, ll. 615-709).

Much of the first section of the book is concerned with the subject of death, and this preoccupation is paralleled in symbolic terms by the use of corresponding imagery. Here, Marian, praying for God's succour (IV, ll. 41-43), nurses the dying seamstress Lucy Gresham, who is lying in the same bed as her dying grandmother. Lucy's death, and her union with 'spiritual entities', is described in disappointingly sentimental terms:

> So Marian sat by Lucy's bed, content
> With duty, and was strong, for recompense,
> To hold the lamp of human love arm-high,
> To catch the death-strained eyes and comfort them,
> Until the angels, on the luminous side
> Of death, had got theirs ready (IV, ll. 44-49).

These sentimental lines make no speculation as to the nature of these "angels" though they imply that death, with its "luminous side", indicates not the termination of life, but a new existence, an 'illumination' of its own enigma and of the conundrum of the human state - not an annihilation of consciousness ending in darkness, but a rejuvenation of awareness on some spiritual plane. If it is the poet's intention to convey such a personal metaphysical insight, one would argue that the sentimental style seems inappropriate to the profundity of the concept. Such sentimental paralleling of human and angelic states is introduced again at the point when Romney enters the death-chamber. Lucy has just been carried away by angels to her spiritual existence, and Romney is now described as Marian's angel: "It was the hour for angels - there, stood hers!" (IV, l. 77). Again, the

mawkishness of such a line would appear to be a feature of this whole passage in Book Four: when Lucy dies, her old grandmother pleads with Romney not to be mistaken for Lucy's corpse:

> Sir, sir, you won't mistake me for the corpse?
> Don't look at me, sir! never bury me!..
> Lucy is the corpse ...
> Marian Erle,
> Speak up and show the gentleman the corpse (IV, ll. 64-65, 71, 74-5).

If Elizabeth's intention here is to create in the reader a reaction of outrage or sympathy for the appalling conditions of the poor, who even share a death-bed here, the effect created is so grotesque and so absurd that any didactic social intention (or even a basic invocation of sympathy) is completely frustrated by the rather clumsy handling of the sequence.

When Lucy's grandmother finally dies (IV, ll.101-108), the event is the subject for the introduction of more related references indicative of the poet's preoccupation with death; Marian:

> ... smoothed the empty bed, and swept the floor
> Of coffin sawdust, set the chairs anew
> The dead had ended gossip in (IV, ll. 103-105)

There are other images in the book taken from the subject of death which are stylistically important not only in stressing the significant role which death played in the reunion of Marian and Romney, but also in creating a predominant atmosphere of death designed to invoke the reader's appreciation of the misery of the poor who live, and die, in squalor. Were the poet's handling of this theme rather more cautious she would perhaps have been more successful in this aim.

Nevertheless, there is a series of similar images running throughout the narrative which demonstrate more positively the poet's stylistic skill in weaving such images into the fabric of the book. First, the poet describes the arrival of Romney in the death-chamber thus:

> ... As grass to graves, as moss to mildewed stones,
> ... As ministering spirits to mourners, through a loss,
> As Heaven itself to men, through pangs of death,
> He came uncalled wherever grief had come (IV, ll. 80, 82-84).

The effect of these images is to relieve the gloomy atmosphere of the narrative, at this point - just as, thematically, the literal arrival of Romney on the scene lightens Marian's heart, while the appropriateness of the imagery (graves, mildewed stones, ministering spirits and mourners) is obvious.

The image of the grave occurs frequently in Book Four. Speaking of the unlikelihood of her marriage to him, Marian informs Romney: "I think you'll find me sooner in my grave" (IV, l. 964). Romney himself introduces the image too; defending his idea of a marriage transcending class, Romney speaks of the universality of death, to which all come regardless of social standing or position:

> ... they come back to it at last,
> The first grave-digger proves it with a spade,
> and pats all even (IV, ll. 114-16).

Such gruesome images as these, used in discussions of a normally joyful subject, marriage, reinforce the notion of death's all-important role in human affairs, levelling all men, providing an ultimate context for all earthly activities. Such a notion is decidedly morbid, even though the poet argues that, within the Christian framework, Death loses its sting: Aurora refers to "saints in heaven" (IV, l. 310),

suggesting that since there is an after-life beyond death, Man should never become totally oppressed by the sense of his own mortality.

Nevertheless, the image of the grave is a predominant one in Book Four. Romney, referring to the poor district where Lucy Gresham has died, speaks of:

> These hideous streets, these graves, where men alive
> Packed close with earthworms, burr unconsciously
> About the plague that slew them (IV, ll. 387-89).

The notion behind the image is that to the poor, who have no comfort in this life, existence in this world is a pitiful 'living Death'. Aurora takes up the image in her description of the church on the morning of the wedding, referring to the poor in the congregation thus:

> ... You'd suppose
> A finished generation, dead of plague,
> Swept outward from their graves into the sun,
> The moil of death upon them (IV, ll. 547-50).

Similarly, there are images concerning Indian brides dying on their husbands' funeral pyres (IV, ll. 196-202), the "burial day of kings" (IV, l. 552), and imagery of speaking and dying, and speaking and killing (IV, ll. 1191-2). Some of the death-images in the book directly relate stylistically to the narrative theme: the image of the baby found sleeping beside the breast of its dead mother (IV, ll. 1064-1066) recalls the earlier description of Lucy Gresham and her grandmother dying in the same bed, while Aurora, when addressing Romney after Marian's flight, describes how she spoke to him:

> As low as when you speak to mourners new
> Of those they cannot bear yet to call dead (IV, ll. 1046-1047).

This image, again, recalls the earlier deaths of Lucy Gresham and her grandmother, who, pitifully, had no mourners apart from Marian herself. Further, since it is probable that Marian has fled in the company of a prostitute, Rose Bell, whose profession (we subsequently learn) Marian had adopted, it would be to many of Elizabeth's shocked readers as if Marian had literally 'died', leaving Romney to 'mourn' her. This is a theme developed fully in later books. Similarly reminiscent of Lucy's recent death is the poet's description of Romney's farewell to Aurora as they leave the death-chamber: his good-night sounded ominous "like goodnight/ Beside a deathbed" (IV, ll. 434-35). Again, the imagery is a skilful relation, on the part of the poet, of the style to the theme of death, which dominates Book Four: the whole effect here is to emphasise the all-important nature of human death, the realisation of which can shape one's whole perspective of human life.

Another image relating to the grave is that concerning King Lear, who is described as being "flat and quiet, as a decent grave" (IV, l. 787). The parallel being drawn here is one that censures the heartlessness of a materialistic society: Aurora sees the expelled, deprived Lear as a symbol of England's working classes, while his daughters symbolise the selfish wealthy classes. Thus Lear, who is flat and quiet like a grave, symbolises the helpless subservience and prostrate humiliation of the poor, who are 'grave-like' in that, again, their existence is a 'living death'.

The dire and menacing importance which death holds for the human individual is also asserted by the poet's mention, in one breath, of "ugly shame or death" (IV, l. 416). This phrase has an associative effect, which qualifies 'death' by associating it as an alternative to the appalling prospect of 'ugly shame'. The sense of death as a severance from life is asserted through the deaths of Lucy and her

grandmother, and by Marian's mention of her own death (IV, l. 953). Nevertheless, it is the poet's argument that we are not left entirely alone to face death: our existence is enigmatic, and a barrier which:

> ... shuts the heavens' conventual secrets up
> From mortals overbold (IV, ll. 993-94);

but the poet hints, as before, that another life, a spiritual existence, lies beyond the grimness of death which, as we have seen, overshadows life. Once again, however, the poet offers no profound insight into the nature of the after-life. She is fully aware of the possibility of the existence of supernatural entities. There are mentions of the angel that might come from heaven "to live with men and women" (IV, l. 922), of devils and angels (IV, l. 1056), even of fays and imps (IV, l. 487). The poet's interest in such beings is reflected too in her choice of imagery. Romney, mystified by Marian's disappearance, exclaims:

> Whoever disappears except a ghost?
> And who believes a story of a ghost? (IV, ll. 834-35),

while the intensely socially-aware Romney is himself described by Marian as an angel, in danger of beating himself:

> Against the edges of this alien world
> In some divine and fluttering pity (IV, ll. 928-29).

However, these supernatural entities - angels and ghosts - provide no clue as to the poet's thinking concerning the nature of the after-life. Similarly there is no insight to be obtained from the poet's use of the term 'soul', which is given a vague and indeterminate application throughout the book. At times it is used to imply the religious or spiritually aware aspect of humanity (IV, ll. 971-72, 1080).

Elsewhere the term indicates rather more specifically the notion of a person's innate goodness or moral sense (IV, ll. 100, 940). Conversely, Lady Waldemar's "soul" is referred to with reference to her badness or immorality (IV, l. 529), and there is a similar usage of the term by Romney when he speaks of Rose Bell (IV, l. 1061). "Soul" is used too to denote a person's loving impulse (IV, l. 128), or to distinguish all the mental, emotional and intuitive faculties from the physical body (IV, l. 1058), or even simply to mean being, the self, or individual (IV, ll. 37, 184, 390, 821, 875).

The fourth book of Aurora Leigh, therefore, is probably the section most dominated by the subject of death in thematic terms, while the poet's preoccupation with that subject is revealed through her related imagery. While death is presented as a sombre and grave matter, however, the poet implies that there is hope of life beyond death: the nature of such a life, however, is not explored by the poet, although the reader's disappointment in this respect is partially offset, as has been seen, by the poet's indication that heaven, though a certainty, holds its secrets to itself (IV, ll. 993-94).

Just as Book Four has a greater preoccupation with death than any other section of the poem, so Book Five has more to say regarding the after-life than any other part of the work.

Here, Aurora expresses some of her thoughts relating to the nature of her poetic vocation. She despairs that her poetry has merely touched the surface of life, with no deep penetration of the great questions relating to Truth, Art and Beauty. She is currently engaged upon an epic concerned with her own times, since she does not consider - unlike many others - that her contemporary age is 'unheroic'. Art to her is a vocation of the utmost seriousness, and she is dedicated with a determination which neither critics nor public can influence.

She rejects drama as her form since the contemporary theatre is pandering to the lowest public tastes. She also laments her loneliness, feeling that other artists have the support of their various intimate relationships - parental, filial, marital.

Here, Aurora is a mouth-piece for some of Elizabeth's own views: Elizabeth aimed, through Aurora Leigh, to create an epic reflecting the 'heroic' nature of her own age, in which she strongly believed. She dedicated herself to her work as determinedly as Aurora does, and she, too, rejected drama as a suitable literary form on the grounds of the degraded state of the popular theatre. Finally, Elizabeth, alone and secluded in her rooms before her relationship with Browning began, surely knew more intimately than most the lonely state of the creative artist working in total isolation.

Book Five also describes Aurora's hearing that Romney has turned Leigh Hall into almshouses, and that he is to marry Lady Waldemar. At the end of the book Aurora leaves England for France.

This book, too, is not without its absurdities of plot and symbolic excesses: the idea of Leigh Hall as a phalanstery seems somewhat implausible, although there were experiments of this nature, such as the one instigated by Owen at Queenwood Hall, Hampshire, in 1842. Indeed, Gardner B. Taplin considers this passage as an instance of Elizabeth's rather unique satire, asserting: "The picture of a horde of undisciplined, uneducated female waifs swarming about the valuable furniture, books, and art galleries of Leigh Hall was a burlesque of both French and English socialism" (Taplin, p. 327). Other aspects of Book Five are more obvious symbolic excesses, such as the image which compares burning lava to a woman's breasts (V, ll. 213-19), a metaphor related very tenuously to the opening lines of the book which describe the creative energy of God as "lava-lymph" (V, l. 3).

Book Five has much to say regarding the after-life. It is probably here, within the twelve hundred lines of this book, that we find the fullest and most concentrated exploration of the theme than is found anywhere else in Elizabeth's work. Here the poet conveys a sense of the after-life being attained through a traumatic process of spiritual intensity, in which the imprisoning human body is destroyed, as it were, and the individual soul passes from this transient, mutable sphere. The poet refers to:

> ... the great escapings of ecstatic souls
> Who, in a rush of too long prisoned flame,
> Their radiant faces upward, burn away
> This dark of the body, issuing on a world
> Beyond our mortal (V, ll. 20-24).

The poet is not arguing in a negative sense that this life is to be scorned and rejected, but rather - in a more positive vein - that the fullest expression of passionate human intensity is to be experienced after death, when the immortal life breaks upon the soul, which is then able to transcend the limitations of this "dark of the body" in an experience of complete ecstasy. To the poet, therefore, this life or body is, indeed, a prison, not because negatively, death is to be glorified and revelled in, but because it gives way to a state which represents genuine freedom and release, true completion and fulfilment.

The image of fire (flames and burning) used by the poet in describing the process from this life to immortality is appropriate in conveying a sense of the purgatorial intensity inherent in this spiritual ecstasy.

Here, then, we have an impression of the positivism of the actual process of death. Elsewhere, the poet expresses a view of the

eternal, which approaches the philosophy of the 'world-soul' found earlier in her poetry. She declares:

> There's not a flower of spring
> That dies ere June but vaunts itself allied
> By issue and symbol, by significance
> And correspondence, to that spirit-world
> Outside the limits of our space and time,
> Whereto we are bound (V, ll. 120-125).

These lines, besides asserting the inevitability and the very transcendence of the after-life, introduce the typically spiritualist term 'spirit-world' in referring to the hereafter. The lines are also important for the concept expressed in them that every individual flower, every minute unit in creation, is related to the Ultimate creative spirit which pervades the entire cosmos, sustaining all creation, moving through all life and being. The notion, although indeed Christian in essence, is less so in expression: although Christ spoke of God's interest even in lilies and sparrows, let alone in individual men and women, Elizabeth's terminology here, speaking of spirit-worlds beyond the limits of time and space, conveys less a sense of the Christian mystical tradition than of an individual esoteric spiritual conviction.

This exploration of areas of spirituality less obviously within the bounds of basic Christianity - though at the same time not defiant of it- is reminiscent of the spiritualists' interest in subjects beyond the scope of orthodox Christianity including eastern religions and mysticism, even Swedenborgianism. This is an area of great interest because Elizabeth proceeds to a further assertion of spiritual conviction which introduces the subject of neoplatonism. Referring to one Mark Gage, a persona for the realist in artistic expression, the poet declares that Gage's art, truthfully attending to the specific detail

of exterior forms, and thereby blazing forth the truth too of the inner vision within these exterior forms, leaves the viewer with Plotinus (4):

> ... Mark Gage,
> For that caressing colour and trancing tone
> Whereby you're swept away and melted in
> The sensual element, which with a back wave
> Restores you to the level of pure souls
> And leaves you with Plotinus (V, ll. 511-16).

The poet suggests here not only that a realistic approach to Art can result in visionary enlightenment, or that such enlightenment implies overtones of spiritual vision ("the level of pure souls"), but also that such ideas relate more specifically to certain Neoplatonist theories than to basic New Testament theology. Here Elizabeth seems to have moved beyond concentrating solely on orthodox Christianity: just as St. Augustine of Hippo introduced certain aspects of Neoplatonist thinking into the mainstream of Christian thought, so too Elizabeth's tracing here of classical influences upon Christian spiritual thinking is an example of her intelligent use of her classical learning. This attitude related too to the thinking of some spiritualists, whose interests extended beyond the New Testament to include ancient alphabets and symbolism, and 'spirit guides' who claimed near eastern, Indian or oriental origins.

In Book Five there are other references to the form that a spiritual existence might take. The poet refers to the beautiful voice of a singer as a "pungent spirit-dart" (V, l. 907), which might touch "the silver tops of heaven itself" (V, l. 906). These references imply perhaps a rather daunting sense of the remoteness of the spiritual life from this present existence. More important, however, is the

impression conveyed of heaven being a place of beauty which responds to the transcending beauty of human Art - in this case, in the form of music, the voice.

This sense of the deep gulf which lies between the spiritual world and this life is found too in the lines in which Aurora asserts her belief in the heavenly existence of her loved ones - her mother and father, declaring:

> ... Up in heaven
> I have my father - with my mother's face
> Beside him in a blotch of heavenly light (V, ll. 546-48).

She asserts too:

> Death quite unfellows us,
> Sets dreadful odds betwixt the live and dead,
> And makes us part as those at Babel did
> Through sudden ignorance of a common tongue (V, ll. 552-55).

These lines too reflect the poet's acute sense of the implications of death as a total severance from this life. They introduce the most explicit reference to Spiritualism in Elizabeth's work. Lamenting her lonely state, Aurora declares that her dead father was the only one who ever understood her, and she suggests that her father may be of aid to her despite his death since some men assert the possibility of communicating with the dead:

> I've seen some men, veracious, nowise mad,
> Who have thought or dreamed, declared and testified
> They heard the Dead a-ticking like a clock
> Which strikes the hours of the eternities,
> Beside them, with their natural ears, - and known
> That human spirits feel the human way
> And hate the unreasoning awe which waves them off
> From possible communion. It may be (V, ll. 563-70).

The importance of these lines lies not so much in what they say as how they convey their argument. The poet's tone is cautious, restrained, suggestive: she does not openly assert the possibility of communication with spirits, but states that "some" men have "thought or dreamed" that they had proof of such communication. Elizabeth's poetic caution on this point is, indeed, reflected by her own statements concerning how careful she needed to be, and had been, in introducing the subject of Spiritualism into Aurora Leigh (5). The closing lines of the reference, too, argue the case of the phenomenon presented. The poet insists that the investigators have detected the human personalities of the 'spirits' who are, she says, dismayed by the irrational fear which we on earth feel towards death - a terror which obstructs any communion with these spirits. This notion, too, relates to real-life circumstances: spiritualists - especially mediums - were concerned to propagate their cause not by instilling into their sitters dread and terror of the phenomena produced. The subject does, of course, project its own mysterious, rather sinister nature. Nevertheless it is true that most séances were held in the home, among families, in which messages from departed relatives and friends were reputedly conveyed, and the other phenomena produced through familiar objects - tables, accordions, wreaths, bells. It is in this light that Elizabeth argues here that the spirits "feel the human way" and are discouraged by the horror of death felt by those on earth. An interesting contrast with the homely drawing-room familiarity of nineteenth century Spiritualism, is provided by modern witchcraft, with its insistence upon anonymity, mystery, the use of strange incantations, the cabbala, the introduction of disturbing sacrificial elements, and strange - sometimes grotesque - symbolism and ritual.

It is perhaps significant that the only clue given to Elizabeth's thinking regarding what nature or form a 'spirit' might have, is contained in these lines. Her implication is in keeping with orthodox spiritualist doctrine - that the 'spirits' are disembodied human personalities, with an individuality, an emotional sensibility, a character exactly resembling those of a living person. Here, then, we find no complex doctrine of a world-soul, no opinion expressed that, following death, the human soul is absorbed back into the universal Spirit or God that sustains the entire cosmos. For, throughout Book Five, the poet's use of spiritual terminology is as erratic and as vague as has been noted elsewhere in the poem: "soul" sometimes implies the loving emotional impulse of an individual (V, ll. 14-16), or that which requires or seeks out Love (V, l. 1113); sometimes it seems to mean the poetic imagination or the artistic faculty (V, ll. 191, 414, 927-29); elsewhere it means spiritual wealth, as when the poet declares that "desert souls" reveal spiritual or emotional deprivation (V, l. 501). "Soul" can mean heart, emotion or feeling (V, l. 970), transcendent inner being or vision trapped in the sepulchre of this world, this body (V, ll. 1039-1041); it can mean intuition, as when the poet refers to "soul-strokes" as things of beauty such as an antipathy towards war or violence (V, l. 938); "soul" can appear to mean being, possibly, even spirit (V, l. 1191), or person, implying the mind, the whole spiritual being or spiritual yearning (V, l.1269); sometimes it simply means people (V, ll. 156, 427). Perhaps the most interesting use of the term 'soul' in Book Five occurs when the poet suggests that the inferior drama of her age would be better using the soul as a stage, implying that the purest form of drama would concern itself with transcendent spiritual aspirations rather than the exterior forms of theatricality, thereby attaining artistic truth (V, ll. 340-43).

Similarly the term "spirit" is used with a number of apparently different meanings, not all of which are particularised - "spirit" can mean intuition or imagination (V, l. 224); "spirit" also seems to refer to the life within a work of art, or simply the mood or atmosphere which it conveys (V, l. 226). This use of the term 'spirit' in an artistic context also occurs when Aurora speaks of her "spirits", implying, perhaps, her faith in her poetic ability (V, l. 424).

This intimate relationship between spiritual and artistic matters is conveyed in the poem in a number of relevant passages, such as when Aurora parallels Art and God:

Art for art,

And good for God Himself, the essential Good! (V, ll. 69-70),

and when she asserts that books can be "as cold and flat as graveyard stones" (V, l. 360), implying that literary works need life, animation - perhaps even 'spirit', that flame of imaginative itensity achieved only when the human spirit is involved in the creative act.

Elsewhere in the book considerable importance is attached to the subject of death. Asserting that the Greeks rhetorically declared the blissfulness of a noble death, and said: "Let no one be called happy till his death" (V, l. 75), the poet, on the other hand, emphasises the importance of a positive response to <u>this</u> life, stating that death cannot be regarded as anything but an unhappy occasion (V, ll. 76-7). Again, in describing the positivism of Aurora's approach to her Art, the poet reverses much of her former argument concerning the importance of old works produced by long-dead masters. Speaking of former epics which chose medieval, classical or legendary themes for their subjects, the poet asserts that the latter are:

As dead as ~~much~~ be, for the greater part, must /
The poems made on their chivalric bones;
And that's no wonder: death inherits death (V, ll. 197-99).

Similarly, later at Lord Howe's literary soirée, Grimwald is said by the poet to be wishing that he could crunch the bones of certain old writers, and wished them alive "to feel his tooth in earnest" (V, ll. 660-62). The former quotation implies that dull, lifeless works of art are those which have thematic preoccupations steeped in the past, in an unhealthy obsessive reverence for dead themes, dead heroes, dead history - that these works lack the dynamism and vitality of other works concerned with the important issues of the present age. Such an attitude, if it can be assumed to be that of Elizabeth as well as of Aurora, suggests a development in the poet's thinking. Aurora Leigh was, indeed, intended to be an epic set in Elizabeth's own age, exploring themes relevant to that age, whereas much of her earlier work demonstrated a preoccupation with ballad forms and legendary, classical and Romance themes. More important, however, is her suggestion that a literary motivation centred upon the present can result in a purer, more intensely 'truthful' form of Art which would overrule the claims of old themes and previous achievements, because in her earlier poems she had frequently implied that old artists, heroes and patriots did attain a form of immortality through their artistic or political work. This new idea - that it is more important to strive positively towards new themes and modes of expression, than to re-echo dead, traditional subjects and forms, had been prepared for by the Italian volumes discussed in the previous chapter, where frequently the poet, while conceding the importance of giving reverence to dead heroes, insists upon the desperate need for concentration upon the problems of this age, this society. As far as Art is concerned, the argument

is fallacious: any work,however vital and 'modern' in its subject and theme, would also be immediately dead upon completion according to Aurora's theory, because Time is never still, and a new work - if it survives at all - is rapidly absorbed into the corpus of an organic literary tradition. Nevertheless, the theory does raise interesting issues relevant to the so-called 'philosophy' of Art, such as how a work can be said to have attained originality or imaginative power, how and why some works 'survive', the importance of an organic view of Art, and the approach to criticism based on a purely so-called 'formalistic' consideration.

There are a number of miscellaneous references in Book Five that indicate the poet's continuing interest in supernatural entities, and in the subject of death as a source of poetic imagery: for example, earth is described as "a mere dumb corpse" enlivened and vitalised by the presence of Christ (V, ll. 103-106); Marian Erle is described as an "embodied ghost" (V, l. 1100), while Aurora describes her life as the "silence of ecstatic graves" which she considers the appeal of Italy - the land of her birth - to have pierced (V, ll. 1194-1196). There are references to the saints in heaven (V, ll. 51-52), to "a guardian saint" (V, l. 523), and to St. Lucy (V, l. 684). Other supernatural entities mentioned which are pagan rather than Christian include the vampire (V, l. 116), the Scandinavian myth of Lemures, which were wandering spirits of the dead, or ghosts (V, l.600), Sir Blaise's reference to mermaids (V, l. 740), the notion of the witch and her flying ointment by which she was able reputedly to mount and ride upon her broomstick (V, ll. 1196-1198), the references to the Devil (V, ll.1202, 1206), and to Faustus (V, l. 1204). Finally the poet introduces the deathly image of the sacrificial goat slain during rites in homage to Bacchus (V, ll. 319-20), the concept of Lady Waldemar appearing immortal

in her beauty (V, l. 618), and the reference to "Joseph Strangways, the Leeds mesmerist" (V, l. 605).

Book Six of Aurora Leigh describes how Aurora, en route for Italy, met Marian Erle in Paris. Marian informs Aurora that she fled from marriage to Romney because Lady Waldemar convinced her of the problems which would result from the unequal match, and persuaded her to leave England for Australia; but she deceived Marian, trapping her in Paris where she was raped and bore an illegitimate child. Again, the sequence in which Marian is drugged and raped bears a strong similarity to the episode in Sue's Mystères de Paris in which Louise Morel is drugged and raped by Jacques Ferrand.

Book Six contains some fine passages expressive of the poet's power of visual description, including the descriptions of Paris (VI, ll. 78-127, 422-33), its environs and Marian's abode (VI, ll. 507-41), and Marian and her child (VI, ll.560-611). The major flaw in the book lies in the implausibility of Lady Waldemar's having duped Marian into believing that she had arrived, after a short sea-crossing, in Australia, when they had merely reached France. Another problematic passage is Aurora's uncompromising assault on Marian's morals when she sees the girl's child. Aurora appears self-righteously perfect and insufferably priggish, contrasting with Marian's liveliness, vigour and passion (VI, ll. 695-723), while Aurora's capitulation after this, having previously adopted her high-flown code of righteousness, to an extent damages her moral credibility in the work. This aspect, however, will be discussed in detail later.

Just as Book Four showed a preoccupation with death in a thematic sense, and Book Five had more to say concerning the spiritual life than any other section of the poem, so Book Six is significant for the

extensive use of death-imagery applied to the person of Marian Erle: a secondary significant source of symbolism relating to her is the poet's use of sea, water and drowning imagery, the sexual significance of which (with regard to the raped Marian) Elizabeth was doubtless unaware of.

When Aurora first catches sight of Marian in the streets of Paris, she likens her horror at seeing the once-familiar face to the dreadful prospect of seeing the "dead face, known once alive" of a corpse floating on a pond (VI, ll.235-42). The significance of the image lies in the fact that, in a sense, the fallen Marian is 'dead' indeed; the poet asserts that Marian's moral 'death' causes Aurora to regard the tormented face of the fallen girl she once loved, as akin to the face of the corpse of someone one knew when they were alive:

> ... That face persists,
> It floats up, it turns over in my mind,
> As like to Marian as one dead is like
> The same alive (VI, ll. 308-11).

The symbol of death by drowning is a recurrent one in the book, significantly applied to the sexually fallen Marian. For example, she describes herself thus:

> ... that world of yours has dealt with me
> As when the hard sea bites and chews a stone
> And changes the first form of it. I've marked
> A shore of pebbles bitten to one shape
> From all the various life of madrepores;
> And so, that little stone, called Marian Erle,
> Picked up and dropped by you and another friend,
> Was ground and tortured by the incessant sea
> And bruised from what she was (VI, ll. 804-12).

The sea-imagery is re-echoed later in Marian's description of her fatal voyage to France (VI, ll. 1207-1213).

Returning to the image of death, Marian asserts that she is not dead, but damned (VI, ll. 365-66). When Aurora considers calling out in desperation for Marian in the streets of Paris, we read that she:

> ... could call Marian, Marian, with the shriek
> Of desperate creatures calling for the Dead (VI, ll. 256-57).

The significance of these lines, again, lies in the fact that Marian is indeed 'dead' in a moral sense according to the tenets of her age, having fallen - through the evil of Lady Waldemar - from her lofty position as Romney's bride, to the level of a Parisian whore. In her agonised contemplation of Marian's fall, Aurora reflects on the distressing cruelty of life, which pits individuals against each other - men against women, and "against the living the dead" (VI, l. 292).

The rather extreme conviction of the pure Aurora that Marian's moral decline is as dire as her 'death' would be, moves her to describe Marian's squalid room as "scarce larger than a grave, and near as bare" (VI, l. 552). Aurora's notion of the "dead" state of the fallen Marian is paralleled by Marian's own assessment of herself. She describes her situation thus:

> ... changed! death's a change,
> And she, I said, was murdered; Marian's dead.
> What can you do with people when they are dead
> But, if you are pious, sing a hymn and go;
> Or, if you are tender, heave a sigh and go;
> But go by all means, - and permit the grass
> To keep its green feud up, 'twixt them and you?
> Then leave me, - let me rest. I'm dead, I say,

And if, to save the child from death as well,
The mother in me has survived the rest,
Why, that's God's miracle you must not tax,
I'm not less dead for that ... (VI, ll. 812-23).

Marian again refers to herself as "dead" (VI, l. 848), and declares:

... since your Marian's dead,
You shall not hang her up, but dig a hole
And bury her in silence (VI, ll. 894-96).

In relating her moral fall, Marian describes it as:

What griping death within the drowning death
Was ready to complete my sum of death (VI, ll. 1117-1118).

In her narration of her fall, Marian introduces an excessive amount of death-imagery to relate her experiences. When Lady Waldemar offers to send her to Australia, Marian says that she thanked her:

As men upon their death-beds thank last friends
Who lay the pillow straight; it is not much,
And yet 'tis all of which they are capable,
This lying smoothly in a bed to die (VI, ll. 1136-1139).

Again, the implication is that Marian was being sent to her (moral) demise by her evil rival. Marian explains her earlier sinister misgivings regarding Lady Waldemar, which made her "veins run cold/ As somebody were walking on my grave" (VI, ll. 1155-1156). Indeed, it was as if Lady Waldemar were leading her off to her death in the ship:

Men carry a corpse thus, - past the doorway, past
The garden-gate... then they leave it in the pit,
To sleep and find corruption, cheek to cheek
With him who stinks since Friday. But suppose;

To go down with one's soul into the grave,

To go down half-dead, half-alive, I say,

And wake up with corruption ... cheek to cheek

With him who stinks since Friday (VI, ll. 1194-1202).

This is perhaps the most gruesome of these string of death-images, and as Marian continues one feels increasingly that the poet has piled these death-images one upon another rather heavy-handedly, as if aiming to impress the reader with Marian's sense of her moral 'death', rather than introducing an otherwise potentially powerful image with care and restraint. Marian describes her awakening in the brothel:".. . I waked up in the grave" (VI, l. 1218). Later, when roaming distractedly across the countryside, she describes the terrain as being crossed by rows of poplars:

Like fingers of some ghastly skeleton Hand...

Pushed out from hell itself to pluck me back,

And resolute to get me, slow and sure (VI, ll. 1243-1246).

Marian regards herself as totally oppressed by her fate, which she sees symbolised in the setting sun. This she describes as:

The great red stone upon my sepulchre,

Which angels were too weak to roll away (VI, ll. 1273-1274).

This succession of death-images would appear to be a stylistic failing on the poet's part. The imagery seems rather extreme and out of proportion to the degree of Marian's failing, so that one is left rather with an impression of the poet's obsession with the subject of death, than with her skill in introducing and controlling a strong and dominant image. Perhaps the poet's intention is to convey Marian's extraordinary sense of guilt which, in turn, might stress her goodness

under normal circumstances, her sensitivity and her integrity. It is important too, that Aurora's attack on Marian, already referred to, indicates that Aurora herself would have believed Marian to have 'died' in her moral decline. In a sense Elizabeth at first sight seems to be pandering to the moralistic attitudes of her age. Certainly to the modern reader it seems absurd for Marian to consider herself to have 'died' because she has been raped, and cruel and priggish of Aurora to assert that she is justified in such extreme self-censure. Indeed, as it was many contemporary readers castigated the poem for its exploration of prostitution and illegitimacy, and one is reminded of the seriousness with which the 'fall' of other nineteenth century fictional women who are raped and then give birth to a child, is regarded, such as Tess Durbeyfield, Ruth Hilton, and Hetty Sorrel. In fact, however, it is certain that Elizabeth's intention here is to question rather than to sustain the rigid official moral stand-point of her age - although it is true that she herself was shocked upon discovering that her maid, Wilson, had married when already pregnant (Taplin, p. 291). Nevertheless, it is significant both that Marian retains her sympathetic character in the poem, and that Aurora - the mouthpiece of conservative morality in the work - is seen to adopt her uncompromising moral condemnation of Marian. Aurora asserts that however morally 'dead' Marian might be, it is better to have her alive than for her literally to have died:

> We'll ring the joy-bells, not the funeral-bells,
> Because we have her back, dead or alive (VI, ll. 898-99).

and this attitude is in no way expressed grudgingly by Aurora.

The extensive use of death-imagery in Book Six is not confined to Marian. Aurora refers to her parents' graves (VI, l. 49), and to the bones and grave of Napoleon (VI, l. 129), a subject which she had

explored more fully in Poems before Congress.

Despite the death-dominated imagery of Book Six with its theme of moral fall, it is evident that God is present throughout, for His name is frequently mentioned. Although as she fled after her 'fall' Marian felt that the wayside crucifix-shrines were indicating Christ's anger with her (VI, ll. 1247-1252), the frequent mention of God's presence suggests that, although in the Christian scheme morality is important, the mercy of God cannot be measured or restricted by human moral-standpoints, nor can His all-embracing presence be denied. The morally upstanding Aurora "hopes of one day seeing heaven" (VI, l. 384), and the fallen Marian, too, will in the last event be reconciled to God, cleansed of her imperfections. Although at one stage she had lost hope in heaven (VI, ll. 1179-1181) and declared that: "God Himself/ Was certainly abolished" (VI, ll. 1234-1235), Marian too, in all humility, still conceives of an after-life:

> ... when God says it's time to die
> And bids us go up higher (VI, ll. 720-21),

while Aurora describes Marian's resigned recollection of her past experiences thus:

> ... as one who, safe in heaven,
> Shall tell a story of his lower life
> Unmoved by shame or anger (VI, ll. 901-903).

Indeed, however, the poet's handling of the nature of the immortal life is as disappointing - as trite, even - as this despite the important moral issues which she has so painstakingly striven to explore in this book, and despite the considerable effort taken to introduce the subject of death into the book's symbolic patterning. Spiritual terminology is used as vaguely here as elsewhere: "soul" is applied with reference to characters, personalities or individuals

(VI, ll. 27, 107), in referring to the 'personified'spirit of France (VI, l. 67), in speaking of the being, the impulsive positivism of an individual (VI, l. 305), and with regard to the religious moral sense or conscience (VI, ll. 739, 762, 1178); it is used to refer to the knowing intuition of a person - almost the mind, perception or awareness (VI, ll.337-8, 342), to imply simply 'being' (VI, l. 952), the aesthetic sense (VI, l. 1104). Only rarely does it imply immortal or spiritual being (VI, l. 830), while the less-frequent use of "spirit" does suggest more specifically the immortal essence, that part of the human individual which survives bodily death (VI, ll. 730-2).

Other relevant supernatural references in Book Six include "ghosts" (VI, l. 118), used also in simile-form (VI, ll. 1143-1144), magic crystal and witch (VI, ll. 169-70), angels (VI, ll. 703, 763, 986), Devil (VI, ll. 762, 1147), and Devil's daughter (VI, l. 1175). There is also a reference to the subject of martyrdom (VI, l. 1050).

Book Seven of Aurora Leigh, too, contains some very effective descriptive passages, including that concerning Aurora's train journey through France (VII, ll. 417-52), the voyage from Marseilles to Genoa (VII, ll. 467-89), descriptions of Florence (VII, ll. 515-41, 1216-78), of Italian wild life (VII, ll. 1053-1098), and the river (VII, ll. 1168-1186).

The book includes the remainder of Marian's narration, the journey of her and Aurora to Italy, their residence there, and Aurora's conclusion that Romney has married Lady Waldemar - a conclusion she reache from a vague letter sent by her old acquaintance, Vincent Carrington.

The book introduces an important discussion concerning Art and its spiritual nature, relating the book to Book Five, with its speculations regarding the philosophy of Art. In Book Seven, the poet asserts that Art is an ideal fusion of material and spiritual qualities:

... Natural things
And spiritual, - who separates those two
In art, in morals, or the social drift,
Tears up the bond of nature and brings death,
Paints futile pictures, writes unreal verse (VII, ll. 763-67).

Elizabeth's thinking may partly have been influenced by that of Browning, who suggested similar misgivings as to the artistic integrity of works which are merely an exercise in mechanical skill, in Sordello (1840). Elizabeth implies in the lines above that Art is lifeless if it is merely an exercise in technique or outer forms, and that it is inadequate if it is merely a projection of esoteric, transcendent speculation. Art, for her, is a union of both: an expression of 'vision', presented through a perfect physical form. What precisely is meant by 'spiritual' here, however, is an enigma: the poet is possibly referring to the need for lofty metaphysical thoughts to be present in a work of 'spiritual' significance, or merely that a work of Art must be more than its basic physical form - that is, that it must contain some higher vision of life, a thought, an intuition, a 'message'. If this is so, then indeed it seems to be a valid suggestion. Not all Art is obviously didactic, but all Art comprises, if nothing else, the 'message' of its own existence. This apart, however, the drift of Aurora's argument at this point seems to be a rejection of the introverted role of the solitary artist, excessively devoted to Art, isolated in an adherance to spiritual aestheticism. Aurora concludes that the spiritual is insufficient: she laments the loneliness, and desires involvement in social affairs.

The poet's belief in the intimate relationship between the natural and the spiritual is expressed again later:

Without the spiritual, observe,
The natural's impossible - no form,
No motion: without sensuous, spiritual
Is inappreciable (VII, ll. 773-76).

while she asserts too that it is through the external form of a work of art, and through the basic lucidity of - in the case of a literary work - the narrative, that the artist aspires to the spiritual meaning beyond merely these. The artist:

Holds firmly by the natural, to reach
The spiritual beyond it, - fixes still
The type with mortal vision, to pierce through,
With eyes immortal, to the antitype
Some call the ideal (VII, ll. 779-83).

The artist, therefore, is in some way striving to reach an ideal, to convey through a work a sense of the Absolute. Whether this be God, or Truth, or Beauty, the poet does not make clear: but evidently this ideal is a spiritual value - perhaps, a vision of Man's pure, essential spiritual nature cleansed of the imperfections and complexities that veil this spirituality. For the poet, the spiritual nature of the artist's intention - to reach an ultimate vision of the creator, through a concentration upon the minute particularities of His creation - is what renders trees, leaves and stones "a-piece with and conterminous to his soul" (VII, l. 798).

That for the poet God is inextricably a part of the artist's life, is made clear. The artist concentrates upon the natural world, for:

... Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God (VII, ll. 821-22).

Art too, therefore, is the outer manifestation of God, because it reflects His creation. All earthly beauty - including Art - indicates the presence of the supreme spiritual entity, God:

...Art's the witness of what Is
Behind this show. If this world's show were all,
Then imitation would be all in art;
There, Jove's hand gripes us! - For we stand here, we,
If genuine artists, witnessing for God's
Complete, consummate, undivided work;
That every natural flower which grows on earth
Implies a flower upon the spiritual side (VII, ll. 834-41).

Art, therefore, by depicting the beauty of visible creation, indicates the beauty of the Creator Spirit, God. The human role in this situation is described explicitly by the poet: because human individuals possess a spiritual essence akin to the nature of God Himself, humans are able to appreciate Art and, through their spiritual natures, to relate to God:

... we, whose spirit-sense is somewhat cleared,
May catch at something of the bloom and breath, -
Too vaguely apprehended, though indeed
Still apprehended, consciously or not,
And still transferred to picture, music, verse,
For thrilling audient and beholding souls
By signs and touches which are known to souls (VII, ll. 844-50).

Thus it is that the spiritual significance of otherwise bafflingly material objects shines through them, displaying their relationship with the Spiritual Being who created them; this is what artists perceive when they observe:

The spiritual significance burn through

The hieroglyphic of material shows (VII, ll. 860-61)

and the poet suggests that Art - the "larger life" - needs to capture and to be alive with the spiritual, soulful qualities that shine from beyond it:

... Art itself,

We've called the larger life, must feel the soul

Live past it (VII, ll. 889-91).

It is therefore clear that Aurora's - and perhaps Elizabeth's - view of the artistic function is highly complex, mystical, and essentially spiritual in nature.

It seems curious that, in view of Elizabeth's clear belief that the soul is involved in artistic processes - either as creator or recipient - that, generally speaking, elsewhere the term is given a totally different application. Asserting the importance of the soul (VII, ll. 1000-1001), the phenomenon is never presented purely as the faculty of artistic creativity or appreciation. The "soul" can imply being, sympathy or human warmth (VII, l. 115), feeling, emotion, or the source of loving impulses (VII, l. 593). It can be used to suggest the moral sense (VII, l. 201, and negatively, l. 343), or, specifically, the religious sense (VII, l. 1291). Elsewhere the term is used with reference to inner peace (VII, l. 410), or inner strength, intuition, vision (VII, l. 464), or spiritual power, inner passion (VII, l. 820). Sometimes "souls" are spiritual beings (VII, l. 467), but occasionally the term seems to mean simply people (VII, l. 296), or seems to refer to all which is not the physical body (VII, l. 209), in other words the sum total, perhaps, of all the human emotional, intellectual, intuitive and mental faculties. It is evident, however, that the poet sees the soul as the essence of human immortality, which suggests that,

however vague her use of the term might be, she regards its one specific function as a definition of the immortal spiritual nature of Man that survives bodily death: the poet declares "truth outlives pain, as the soul does life" (VII, l. 745). She suggests that there are some who waste their spiritual energies - their souls - in philosophical speculation, instead of wisely accepting that in death is the very fulfilment of the soul which they are so destructively employing in the course of spurious wrestling to solve the mystery of human existence:

> There are, who waste their souls in working out
> Life's problem on these sands betwixt two tides,
> Concluding, - 'Give us the oyster's part, in death' (VII, ll. 1024-1026).

Again, that the soul is the essence of human spiritual immortality is asserted in some rather curious lines of an anti-Catholic bias: in a Florentine church, Aurora sees women praying, whom she describes as:

> ... poor blind souls
> That writhe toward heaven along the devil's trail (VII, ll. 1258-1260).

As far as heaven and the human soul's attainment of that state is concerned, the poet is sure of the certainty of both (VII, l. 1159). Marian's notion of the fearfulness of death (VII, ll. 52-53) is transcended by her belief that, nevertheless, "God lives too" (VII, l. 113). Aurora herself is hopeful in her notion of death as "disembodiment without the pang" (VII, ll. 1210-11), and she refers to herself, curiously, as being "satisfied with death" (VII, l. 463), meaning, perhaps, that she was resignedly at peace with the prospect of dying and returning to her God.

Two interesting symbols in Book Seven are the images of the grave and interment, and the image of the ghost. As before, the choice of such images, while less obsessive here than, say, in Book Six,

nevertheless indicates the poet's continuing interest in and concern with the subject of death and the spiritual survival of it. In speaking of the consolatary nature of God in His ability to bring good out of evil (though it could be argued that in this case the 'evil' was intensified), Marian refers to God's transformation of a raped girl into a loving mother, and curiously uses the following rather bizarre analogy, declaring that God:

> ... overblows an ugly grave
> With violets which blossom in the spring (VII, ll. 58-59).

Later, with regard to Marian again, Aurora, in her reprimanding letter to Lady Waldemar, informs the latter that she was the instrument which set Marian's:

> ... own love digging its own grave
> Within her green hope's pretty garden-ground (VII, ll. 312-13).

These grave-images relating to Marian re-echo the similar chain of images in Book Six where, as here, the implication is that Marian has suffered a moral 'death' at the hand of Lady Waldemar and her accomplices.

Aurora herself introduces the grave-image on two other occasions: speaking of the disappointment one experiences on returning to a once-loved place to find one's romanticized, idealised and selective memory of it crushed by cruel reality, she describes the destructive impact of the reality as a heavy gravestone, saying that we:

> ... come back to the stone without the dream,
> We trip upon't, - alas, and hurt ourselves;
> Or else it falls on us and grinds us flat,
> The heaviest gravestone on this burying earth (VII, ll. 500-503).

In a similar vein, Aurora later likens her burial of past regrets, forgetting them, to the Visigoth's burial of their king Alaric, together with his richest treasures. He was interred in the river bed of the Busento in southern Italy, in the fifth century A.D, so that his tomb would not be disturbed beneath the returning waters and, accordingly, the grave-diggers, too, were slain. Aurora lyrically declares:

> ... I'm not too much
> A woman, not to be a man for once
> And bury all my Dead like Alaric,
> Depositing the treasures of my soul
> In this drained watercourse, then letting flow
> The river of life again with commerce-ships...
> How I covet here
> The Dead's provision on the river-couch,
> With silver curtains drawn on tinkling rings!
> Or else their rest in quiet crypts - laid by
> From heat and noise (VII, ll. 984-89, 994-98).

Apart from the imagery of the grave and burial, there are a number of symbolic uses of the ghost, apart from the minor reference to "dull Odyssean ghosts" (VII, l. 470). Again with regard to past regrets, lamenting that she was unable to give Romney what he needed, Aurora describes as follows the helplessness of these regrets:

> ... It is strange with what a swell
> Of yearning passion, as a snow of ghosts
> Might beat against the impervious door of heaven,
> I thought ... (VII, ll. 181-84).

The significance of these lines is their implication that 'heaven' is the home of peaceful spirits, which ghosts - the souls of restless, unquiet wanderers - wish to enter. This notion of the ghost as a

restless wanderer is re-echoed later in Aurora's description of herself at the time when, in Italy, she was troubled by loneliness and frustration. She wandered in:

> The cypress alley like a restless ghost
> That tries its feeble ineffectual breath
> Upon its own charred funeral-brands put out
> Too soon, where black and stiff stood up the trees
> Against the broad vermilion of the skies.
> Such skies! - all clouds abolished in a sweep
> Of God's skirt, with a dazzle to ghosts and men
> (VII, ll. 1161-1167).

There are two other images in Book Seven which draw upon the subject of death. When considering that she should send a letter to Romney warning him against marrying Lady Waldemar, Aurora wonders if such a letter might already be too late, that the marriage may already have taken place, in which case the arrival of the letter too late would be like "an arrow shot into a man that's dead" (VII, l. 167). Later, when referring to the fickleness of men, Aurora declares that their unpredictability and changing moods is as strange as a man struck by lightning who, instead of being found "dead and charred" (VII, l. 262) is instead seen "beneath the splintered elm tree" (VII, l. 264), playing pipes.

Other references to death in Book Seven include Aurora's inability to bring herself to visit her parents' graves (VII, ll. 1142-1155), and the fact that her old Assunta is dead (VII, l.1156). References to supernatural entities include the fairy (VII, l. 36), devil (VII, ll. 105, 221), Lamia (VII, l. 147), Lucifer (VII, l. 301), Satan (VII, l. 1287). Christian entities mentioned include the Virgin (VII, l. 43), saints (VII, ll. 44, 1288), cherubim (VII, ll. 817, 1304), and angels (VII, ll. 391, 528-29, 791, 1290).

Book Eight describes Romney's sudden arrival at Aurora's villa, and their subsequent vague conversation, during which Aurora learns quite late that Romney and Lady Waldemar are not married after all. She discovers that Romney's socialist humanitarian projects at Leigh Hall have ended with the destruction of the hall in a fire. Not until Book Nine, however, does she learn that Romney was blinded during the fire.

The book contains some effective passages, including the evocative description of the dusk over Florence (VIII, ll. 28-61). However, the flaws in the book are pronounced, notably the lengthy, circumlatory discussion between Aurora and Romney. Gardner B. Taplin criticises both the confusion over Romney's marriage to Lady Waldemar, and his withholding of the fact that he is blind. Regarding the former, Taplin asserts:

> Elizabeth makes great demands upon the reader's patience as she prolongs the conversation between Romney and Aurora... A straightforward explanation from Romney when he first appeared would have eliminated the need for the long, wearisome passage of ambiguous talk which follows (Taplin, p. 333),

while of Romney's silence upon the subject of his blindness, Taplin observes that Romney rather contrivedly: "spoke mysteriously of the 'night' and the stars shining on his 'dark'" (ibid).

Book Eight raises again the question considered in the previous book relating to the necessity for a synthesis of natural and spiritual factors. Romney asserts this notion when he observes that some have mistakenly:

> ... understood
> Our natural world too insularly, as if
> No spiritual counterpart completed it,
> Consummating its meaning ... (VIII, ll. 616-19).

In Romney's view - and he himself, he admits, was guilty here - the world is far too materialistic, and lacks genuine striving for spiritual perfection and for God. Even those who appear to be spiritually motivated have gone astray, he asserts:

> Beginning so, and filling up with clay
> The wards of this great key, the natural world,
> And fumbling vainly therefore at the lock
> Of the spiritual, we feel ourselves shut in
> With all the wild-beast roar of struggling life (VIII, ll. 657-61).

Aurora agrees with these words, and when she declares that: "poets get directlier at the soul/ Than any of your economists" (VIII, ll. 540-41), her inference is that poets can influence or move men's souls more than economists, and Romney's mistake lay here, in his rejection of the spiritual values of Art, and of Aurora's own vocation, for the exclusive materialism of his socio-political activities. Clearly humanitarian practices are essential, but Romney's fault lay in his refusal to acknowledge the potential of Art as a union between the spiritual and natural. His view now is that:

> The great below (is) clenched by the great above,
> Shade here authenticating substance there,
> The body proving Spirit, as the effect
> The cause: we meantime being too grossly apt
> To hold the natural, as dogs a bone...
> So obstinately, that we'll break our teeth
> Or ever we let go (VIII, ll. 622-29).

These lines, although asserting the duality of physical and spiritual, imply something more far-reaching than simply this - that is, that there is a spiritual sphere which exists in a parallel situation to this terrestrial world. As before, there is little further indication

of the nature of this spiritual sphere in the terminology introduced by the poet: she speaks of the "soul" in a variety of contexts, sometimes implying people, beings or inner selves (VIII, ll. 16, 538, 544, 1039, 1247), referring to inner strength or spiritual power (VIII, l. 58), inner visionary being (VIII, l. 1212), or simply whole being or persona (VIII, ll. 747, 756). "Soul" can refer to the more religious sense of a person (VIII, ll. 545, 662), while elsewhere it suggests, perhaps, merely people - or their spiritual essences/ (VIII, l. 577), possibly even, primarily their loving impuls (VIII, ll. 296, 359, 466). "Spirit", too, is given various shades of significance, seeming to mean merely nature, temperament, or attitude (VIII, l. 497), or bouyant confidence, self-assurance, the vigour of a personality (VIII, l. 513). The most interesting usage of the term 'soul' occurs when it is introduced to contrast with 'body' (VIII, ll. 416-17, 430-31, 549-50). In this traditional sense, 'soul' would seem to imply all which is <u>not</u> physical body - that is, the sum total of mind, emotion, spiritual aspiration, philosophical meditation, and so on. There may also be an indication here, moreover, that 'soul' is the immortal, surviving essence of an individual - be it vague, ethereal, indefinable - in contrast to the physical body which can be seen and touched, and which perishes after death. For there is a notion in Book Eight of human survival of physical death, as when Romney speaks of some Christian teachers as being "in heaven" (VIII, l.615).

Angels appear more figuratively in the book. Speaking of his obsessive materialism, blinding him to spirituality, Romney states:

> ...I could not hear the angels lift
> A fold of rustling air, nor what they said
> To help my pity (VIII, ll. 393-95).

The term 'angel' is used elsewhere in a non-literal sense (VIII, ll. 796, 813, 1088), while the references to devils are equally as

figurative (VIII, ll. 978, 1149).

There are fewer images concerned with death in this book, although some do occur, including the symbol of drowning Miriam (VIII, ll. 334-35), of Ulysses' dead dog (VIII, ll. 507-13, 518-19), and the reference to martyrdom (VIII, l. 971), while Aurora, speaking of the failings of women, declares:

> We'll die for you perhaps...
> But we'll not spare you an inch of our full height:
> We'll have our whole just stature...
> Though laid out in our coffins (VIII, ll. 67-70),

and, finally, Romney, describing the destruction of Leigh Hall and its contents, refers to the ancestral portraits "now nevermore to twit/ The bones in the family vault with ugly death" (VIII, ll. 953-54).

Book Nine, the final and shortest book of Aurora Leigh, is a curious conclusion to the work in which Romney dutifully offers to marry Marian, who refuses him, and reveals to Aurora that he was blinded in the Leigh Hall fire by a beam thrown at him by Marian's father (another similarity between Aurora Leigh and Jane Eyre lies in the two house-fires, and the blinding of the hero; see also Note Two). Aurora and Romney declare their mutual love, and the poem ends in a highly apocalyptic vein, with Romney expressing his doctrine of love, work and faith in the new order which he and Aurora would inaugurate. In some mysterious manner, their souls would climb higher, taking with them those of everyone on earth, until some pure transcendent plane was attained. The new age would then begin - an optimistic era of a purged humanity, a new society, new churches, economic systems and laws. Thus ended Elizabeth's longest single work - in a bizarre and visionary manner.

Apart from the influence of Jane Eyre which can be detected in

the sequences concerning the fire at Leigh Hall and Romney's blindness, it is probable that Elizabeth was inspired by other works too in the final book of Aurora Leigh. The episode describing Marian's rejection of Romney's proposal, and her decision to devote herself to the care of her child, resembles a similar situation in Eugène Sue's Mystères de Paris, in which the heroine, restored to virtue, rejects an offer of marriage from a prince in order to rear her child. Elizabeth's interest here in the problem of the unmarried mother was also partly influenced by her recent reading, in 1853, of Mrs. Gaskell's Ruth (1853) which describes the heroine, Ruth Hilton, in similar circumstances.

Book Nine of Aurora Leigh shows an interesting re-introduction of the rather excessive symbolic technique used in Book Six, of a string of images concerned with the subject of death and relating to Marian Erle. When she meets Romney, Marian exclaims that:

> since we've parted I have passed the grave!
> But Death itself could only better thee (IX, ll. 282-83).

Later, speaking of herself, Marian says that she is:

> ... dead,
> And gone away where none can give or take
> In marriage ... (IX, ll. 308-310),

declaring too that she is unable "to receive, return/ And wed you" (IX, ll. 310-311).

Marian tries to explain her feelings when telling Romney that she does not love him:

> It may be I am colder than the dead
> Who, being dead, love always (IX, ll. 387-88).

These lines suggest a sense of human immortality, implying that human emotional activity does not necessarily end with death. In a

highly morbid image, Marian continues:

I told your cousin, sir, that I was dead;
And now, she thinks I'll get up from my grave,
And wear my chin-cloth for a wedding veil,
And glide along the churchyard like a bride
While all the dead keep whispering through the withes,
'You would be better in your place with us,
You pitiful corruption! (IX, ll. 391-97).

The grotesque prospect of Marian, risen from her grave, dressed in her shroud for the wedding, is especially effective as applied to the notion of her as a fresh, beautiful, living bride.

Finally in this vein, referring to the absurdity of pretending that her illegitimate child is not hers, Marian declares:

... we would sooner vex a soul in heaven
By coupling with it the dead body's thought,
It left behind it in a last month's grave (IX, ll. 410-12).

The significance of these death-images related to Marian, as explained previously, lies in their suggestion that Marian's violation has caused her 'moral death'.

There are other related references in Book Nine, including the image of the woman bruised to death, but whose love remains undestroyed (IX, ll. 359-62), and both Romney and Aurora introduce images concerning the dying (IX, ll. 471-75, 622 respectively). Similarly there is Romney's description of his blindness being "as dark as ten feet under, in the grave" (IX, l. 572), while Aurora's image of the drowned dog (IX, l. 811) recalls that of Ulysses' dead dog in Book Eight. Aurora also describes Romney's life-style following their first separation as when he "took up his life as if it were for death" (IX, l. 808).

As far as the spiritual life is concerned, the book makes a clear distinction between immortal soul and corruptible physical body (IX, ll. 375, 544, 853, 939-40), and between the spiritual and "natural" (IX, l. 650). The most important lines of this nature are those concerning:

> Complete communication, as with souls
> Who, having put the body off, perceive
> Through simply being (IX, ll. 750-52).

These lines suggest that the 'soul' is pure being, the body merely the physical form which it inhabits, and that the spiritual life implies the soul's liberation from the body, and its unhindered spiritual communication with its fellows. It is in a similar sense that Romney speaks of men feeling their way on from the "planes of sensuous form" to "form insensuous" (IX, ll. 920-21), and Aurora's spiritual vision implies these liberated souls, unleashed from the bondage of the physical senses, who are now "seeing spirits toward the east" (IX, l. 951).

The terms 'soul' and 'spirit' are not always used as specifically as this, however, "spirit" implying elsewhere feelings or expectancy (IX, l. 306) or being (IX, l. 582). "Soul" can mean entire being (IX, ll. 170, 471, 481, 537, 803, 831/835), inner being (IX, ll. 763, 876-77, 962), sometimes with the added emphasis of idealistic impulse (IX, l. 154), inner strength (IX, l. 257), spiritual profundity (IX, ll. 297, 871, 933-34), aesthetic sense (IX, l. 642), or loving nature (IX, ll. 610, 880, 882), while Aurora speaks of Woman as "a human soul" in the sense of a feeling, dignified being (IX, l. 329).

Whatever the poet's reflections upon the spiritual life imply in Book Nine, it is evident that the presence of the Christian God pervades throughout, offering a comforting security behind the

philosophical and metaphysical speculations of the work. Aurora declares that she "looked up to feel/ If God stood near me, and beheld His heaven" (IX, ll. 251-52), while referring to her relationship with God, Romney observes: "Now I know He held you in His palm"(IX, l. 519).

The book contains a number of miscellaneous references to physical death, including to Aurora's father's grave (IX, l. 762), and to her aunt's death (IX, ll. 685-86). There are also references to saints (IX, ll. 187-88, 709), and the devil (IX, l. 345), while Aurora's mother is described as a "fairy bride" (IX, l. 766), and Marian likens herself to a "ghost" (IX, l. 389). The most common supernatural entity referred to is the angel, a term often used figuratively by Marian to describe Romney, implying his moral or social goodness (IX, ll. 185, 281, 350, 369), as in Book Four, while the term does receive other forms of usage (IX, ll. 344, 407, 487, 738).

Aurora Leigh is a long work, in some respects unnecessarily so, containing many thematic, linguistic and symbolic faults, as well as some fine passages - particularly of visual description. Despite being weak in characterisation, and frequently implausible in incident, the poem was topical and popular, and is still persuasive in its energetic self-confidence and speedy pace. From the point of view of present purposes, it is evident that Death is an important thematic element in the work. More important, however, is the major role played by the subject of death in the work's symbolic patterning: in some books, the subject is the dominant image - even an excessive one, though for the most part less grotesque in its handling by the poet than in some earlier poems. Aurora Leigh is significant also in containing the few specific references to Spiritualism, including the most specific, in the whole of Elizabeth's work. Herein lies the poet's concept of the nature of the spiritual life - that it concerns the immortal soul

cf 340

or spirit of the individual which, after death, survives, retaining its identity or personality, to exist in some transcendent plane beyond space or time. As far as this immortal spirit in the living is concerned, the poet suggests that it is this faculty which is the aesthetic, artistic element in the human entity, both creative and appreciative of Art: this immortal aspect is also the loving, religiously aspirant, idealistic and quintessential part of the individual.

The last volume of poems to issue from Elizabeth's pen was Last Poems (1862), published posthumously the year after her death, and comprising for the most part the pieces written in the last years of her life. Elizabeth was now a dying woman, and her final volume bore little resemblance to the strength and prolificacy of her work in earlier volumes. Indeed, referring both to Last Poems and to her Italian volumes, Gardner B. Taplin states: "Aurora Leigh was Elizabeth's last major poetical work. The effort of composition had exhausted her; afterward she had almost nothing new to say" (Taplin, p. 348).

The pieces in Last Poems can basically be divided into four groups: those concerned with the deaths of children, those relating to the subject of Love, those concerning despair, and those regarding Italian political issues.

There are two poems thematically concerned with the death of children. Little Mattie concerns the death of a child aged thirteen (l. 1). The poet states that the deceased child is "as old as death" (l. 14), re-echoing a concept found earlier in Elizabeth's work - that death is a universal leveller. The poem makes some speculative suggestions concerning the spiritual life, declaring that, after death, the individual attains a state of total knowledge (ll. 21-24). The poem contrasts the distracted "soul" of the living (l. 34) with

this peaceful transcendence of the dead, stressing that this contrast is due to the deep gulf between this world and the next (ll. 39, 65-70). The notion of the after-life is Christian in a loose sense, for all occurs beneath the canopy of God's love, but it is also disappointingly sentimental. The disembodied "spirits risen" (l. 71) are united with the angels (ll. 83-84) when God:

> ... calls His angel-creature,
> Higher up than you can reach her (ll. 47-48).

Only a Curl also describes a child's death (ll. 14-15). Again, we find a sentimental picture of the child dying and going to God:

> God draws a new angel so
> Through the house of a man up to His (ll. 17-18),

and there is a sentimental notion of the child attaining angelic status (ll. 22, 66), although the poem also contains the more realistic message of despair transcended by hope (even if sentimentally expressed), hope in the child's survival, and in the mother's reunion with him (ll. 67-70).

The most interesting poems in Last Poems are perhaps those concerned with Love. Of these, only The Best Thing in the World is positive. It seems strange that, after several years of emotional happiness in her marriage to Browning, Elizabeth should have chosen to return to the theme of unrequited love in these last poems. It is true that in two of the love poems, Love is destroyed by extrinsic factors: in My Kate, the poet's lover has been lost through death (l. 38), and the lover, contemplating her grave (l. 34), mourns his loss of the truth and integrity of her "soul" (l. 9). In Parting Lovers, the lovers are separated by the Italian war which surrounds them, and the remaining lover is ominously conscious of the role of death in

that war (ll. 41-45, 54-55, 63-64). However, normally in Last Poems, Love is destroyed by fickleness, deception and infidelity.

In Void in Law the husband and wife are separated because the union enacted between them was illegal - the fault of the man. The poem is not entirely negative, however, for it suggests that death means returning to bliss with God: "The grave's mouth, the heaven's gate, God's face" (l. 47), and it introduces the interesting notion of two adult souls united in the being of their child: "Two souls met upon thee, my sweet" (l. 64). The poem is written in ballad-form, implying the studied didacticism of its argument concerning the father's cruel deception of his 'bride'.

Bianca among the Nightingales, also in ballad-form with its chorus-like final line, is one of the most powerful poems in the volume. It builds up a strong atmosphere of mystery with its theme of night, and with the lush sensuousness of its descriptive lines, highly appropriate to the theme of romantic passion:

> The cypress stood up like a church
> That night we felt our love would hold,
> And saintly moonlight seemed to search
> And wash the whole world clean as gold;
> The olives crystallised the vales'
> Broad slopes until the hills grew strong:
> The fire-flies and the nightingales
> Throbbed each to either, flame and song (ll. 1-8).

Here the poet speaks of the human "soul-height" as its aesthetic sense (l. 14), revelling in the beauty of the night scenery and the nightingales' songs. The soul is also immortal (ll. 38-40), although it can be destructive (ll. 106-107). It is also the source of human love (ll. 47, 50-52, 115). In the intensity of her passion, Bianca

pleads that the "cold white moonlight" (l. 28) may act as a "coverture of death" (l. 30), quenching the fire of her unruly passion. As her lover is subsequently unfaithful, Bianca wishes that she and he had died together at that moment, when their love was perfect:

... as for me,
I would we had drowned there, he and I,
That moment, loving perfectly (ll. 83-85).

This death-wish of Bianca's is rendered Keatsian in nature, occurring at night, in an atmosphere of intense sensuous reverie, and in the sound of the nightingales' songs (ll. 124-25), reminiscent of the Ode to a Nightingale. Bianca, obsessed with the nightingales' songs, sees them as symbolic of her loss, her fate:

They'll sing through death who sing through night,
They'll sing and stun me in the tomb (ll. 142-43).

Lord Walter's Wife also concerns the fickleness of love; Lord Walter's unfaithful wife tries to persuade another man into becoming her lover. These two, significantly, are seated beneath a yew tree (l. 1), stressing the negativity, the destructiveness - the deathliness - of Lady Walter's proposition. The poem asserts that the "soul" is the inner being (l. 4), the consciousness - even feeling (l. 25), but, more important, that the soul is immortal in its struggles, endurance and fulfilment (l. 40). The poem also makes frequent references to angels (ll. 16, 17, 54).

Similarly May's Love is a plea for the lover's fidelity, and Amy's Cruelty concerns a woman's cruelty towards her lover, shunning him because he demands her "soul, body, whole existence" (l. 24), and calling him "best angel or worst devil" (l. 38).

From the point of view of this present study the most relevant poem in the volume is Where's Agnes? It too concerns the fickleness of

love, though not of romantic love, but of friendship. The poem concerned Elizabeth's relationship with her treacherous spiritualist friend Sophia Eckley (see Chapter Three). Mrs. Eckley, in order to gain Elizabeth's friendship, lied to her, fraudulently claiming to have had a variety of spiritualistic experiences. Elizabeth was intensely distressed and hurt by her discovery of Mrs. Eckley's treachery, and this poem was written in retrospect, following the severance of the friendship in 1859-60.

Here, the poet imagines that 'Agnes' is "dead in her grave" (l. 2), "dead below" (l. 5), "white, stiff" (l. 7), in her coffin "before they nailed the plank" (l. 9). The poet is distressed to discover that her former friend is now "turned mere dirt" (l. 87), an ambiguous phrase suggesting both Agnes' exposure as a lying imposter and cheat, and her physical disintegration after the death the poet imagines her to have passed through. It is evident, indeed, that Agnes' death - like Marian Erle's - is a moral one:

> ... dead that other way,
> Corrupted thus and lost?
> That sort of worm in the clay? (ll. 16-18).

Agnes' death is the more distressing to the poet because she had believed in the integrity of her friend's "soul" (l. 38), seeing her face as angelic (l. 40), belieiving her nature to be saintly (ll. 23, 97). Puzzling over the exposure of her so-called friend, the poet wonders if, perhaps, Agnes were not sent from heaven to try her (ll. 76-79), and if "like an angel" (l. 85) this strange woman - facially angelic - had been commissioned from heaven "by a spell" (ibid) to test the poet.

This poem is important for the significant role played by Sophia Eckley in Elizabeth's spiritualistic experiences, and also for

the spiritual, angelic and grave-orientated nature of the imagery which it introduces.

The two poems concerned with the subject of despair are My Heart and I and De Profundis. In My Heart and I the poet's death-wish is described in her and her world-weary heart's leaning against a grave-stone (l. 34). The poet describes how they:

> Sit beside the headstone thus,
> And wish that name were carved for us.
> The moss reprints more tenderly
> The hard types of the mason's knife (ll. 2-5).

The image is a sombre and heavy one - although appropriate to the morbidity of the theme. The poem is not entirely pessimistic, however, and does look to the positivism of the after-life, or, at any rate, of a life involving religious or spiritual aspiration: ",... heaven's sweet life renews earth's life" (l. 6).

Similarly De Profundis, another of the rather stronger poems in this collection, begins by describing the poet's weariness with life (ll. 1-70), describing the "deathly touch" of her pilgrim's shoes (l. 54), that is, her progress through life - but ends by turning towards God in hope (ll. 71-120). Although the poet speaks of "seraphs" (l. 83), and "saints" (l. 92), her message does not primarily concern the after-life, but an existence of praise, love, faith and hope in this world.

A considerable number of these Last Poems are concerned with Italian political events, and few of them have anything new to say. Some of these poems introduce the Italian theme rather bizarrely, as a secondary consideration to the poem's main subject, such as A Song for the Ragged Schools of London, which speaks of the slaughter in Italy -

- heaps of "jawbones of a people" (l. 32), but didactically argues that London possesses worse poverty than war - torn Italy (ll. 39-40). The poem speaks sentimentally of the fair English children as being like angels (l. 83), and speaks crudely of "angels in white raiment" (l. 50), among whom, pitifully, these poor English children will find their only peace: "the grave's hope they may be joined in" (l. 102). This miserable possibility - that the only comfort for the poor lies not in this world, in the form of material benefit, but in the next, in spiritual peace, is one already raised in Elizabeth's poetry, as we have seen. Again, The North and the South, written in honour of the Danish Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875), who visited Rome in 1861, explores again a theme explored in the earlier Italian volumes - that of the ability of northern Europeans to contribute idealogically to the political struggles of the Italians. While looking to the northerners' certainty of God's existence (l. 19), the poem pleads, as in the Italian volumes, for "strenuous souls" (l. 161), the dynamic liberators, that the democratic north can supply to oppressed Italy.

Some of these poems concentrate less upon general political themes, and more specifically upon particular incidents, such as Mother and Poet (6). The poem describes the deaths of both of the narrator's sons (ll. 1-4, 39, 58-59, 71). It patriotically insists that people should die for their country if necessary (l. 23), and rather glibly pleading to Christ (ll. 66-70) finds a convenient consolation in the sons' sure entry into heaven, speaking mawkishly of one growing "immortal" and attaining a "height" (ll. 44-45). The poem implies somewhat sentimentally the sons' becoming "dizzy with Heaven" (l. 61), but speaks rather more effectively of "the fire-balls crashing souls out of men" (l. 78).

Similarly, The Forced Recruit concentrates upon the true case of a young Italian, forced to join the Austrian ranks, who was killed by his own compatriots because he refused to fire against his own countrymen. He died (l. 2), "shot to death" (l. 6), but is to be buried among the brave (ll. 3-4). The poem rather sentimentally describes the smile on the soldier's dead mouth (ll. 7-8), and the image of his mouth is re-echoed in the idea of his soul 'kissing' the lip of his own country's guns (l. 40), the imagery of the mouth and the kiss forcing a cruel contrast between the ideals of Love and Life, and the actuality of the war, Death. The recruit's death is a tragedy in itself, accentuated both by the fact that he was fighting on the enemy's side (ll. 25-28, 33-36), and because, this being so, he could not even be said to have died in glory (ll. 41-44).

Other poems show a similar consideration of literal physical death within the context of the Italian events, including First News from Villafranca, which speaks of the bloodshed (l. 10), the dead dying in vain (ll. 28-30), and the debt owed to them by the living (ll. 31-33), and Summing up in Italy, which mentions ancestral graves (l. 55), sepulchres (l. 60), and speaks of the deadness, of the ghostliness of the Bourbon and Hapsburg autocracies (ll. 61-64).

"Died" is a more general poem concerned with the theme of death. The poem emphasises the deadness of the fallen (ll. 1, 5, 10, 15, 21, 26) and the preoccupation with death is appropriately asserted in the description of the corpse's achievements now lying "flat as a gravestone" (l. 24), the reference to Charon (l. 33), who in Greek mythology ferried the dead across the Styx, and the references to the dead sage (l. 34), and the grinning skull (l. 35).

A number of the poems concentrate upon the subject of notable personages, including Garibaldi, The Sword of Castrucchio Castracani, and King Victor Emmanuel Entering Florence April 1860. The latter

speaks of the king's "royal soul" (l. 5), and refers to the "high-thoughted souls" (l. 18) of patriots, implying the concept of the human soul's ideal of integrity and political liberalism - a notion also found in the earlier Italian volumes. Nature's Remorses concerns the wife of King Francis of Naples, and speaks of her "soul" (l. 1) in the context of her whole being as a royal figure totally out of touch with the situation in her country. Italy is described as destroying her husband "like a vengeful ghost" (l. 47) while she, with her funereal laurel wreath (l. 50) is said to be "fresh from the truth of Death" (l. 53), newly educated in the violent, deathly ways of her oppressed people.

On the whole, therefore, Last Poems (1862) does not represent the final supreme creative achievement of Elizabeth's work. Many of the poems are sentimental and re-work earlier themes such as that of Italian politics in the 1850's-60's. The significance of the volume, perhaps, is its illustration of the fact that to the end of her creative life, Elizabeth was preoccupied with themes concerned with human 'death' - the deaths of children, the death of Love, the death of Italian patriots - and preoccupied too with imagery drawn from the subjects of death, the grave, the after-life and spiritual or supernatural entities.

Notes to Chapter Seven

1. Referring to Romney Leigh, Stopford Brooke suggested that the character was modelled upon that of the socialist philanthropist Robert Owen. Significantly, therefore, from Elizabeth's point of view, is the fact that Owen and his son, Robert Dale Owen, were both spiritualists (see Chapter One, Note 21), although Elizabeth does not attempt to present Romney Leigh as a spiritualist.

Stopford Brooke wrote to William Brooke on August 8, 1860 of Robert Owen:

> He took to spirit rapping at the close of his life, and I know no history which so clearly points out that atheism and credulity are brother and sister. He is the man mentioned in Aurora Leigh, [Life and Letters of Stopford Brooke, ed. Laurence Pearsall Jacks (London, 1917) I, 132].

2) Gardner B. Taplin observes that Aurora's rejection of Romney's suit resembles Jane Eyre's rejection of St. John Rivers' proposal of marriage, asserting with regard to Jane Eyre that: "Elizabeth had read and admired (it) a few years before she began the composition of her epic poem" (Taplin, p. 316).

In Jane Eyre, Chapter XXXIV, St. John Rivers, a clergyman dedicated to his vocation as a missionary, proposes marriage to Jane not because he loves her but because he sees in her a fit companion for assisting in his spiritual mission overseas. Jane rejects him, just as Aurora rejects Romney, who similarly proposes to Aurora not because he loves her but because he observes that she is fit to share in his social and political activities. Further interesting parallels are that St. John and Jane, like Romney and Aurora, are cousins, and that Aurora finds herself

in a similarly vulnerable social and financial situation to the one Jane experienced following her flight from Thornfield and her residence with St, John and his sisters.

The closest parallels between Jane Eyre and Aurora Leigh emerge later in the poem, when Leigh Hall, like Thornfield, is burnt down in a fire, during which Romney, like Rochester, the hero of Jane Eyre, is blinded but eventually marries the heroine.

3) It is interesting to consider the probable origin of the name of Lady Waldemar, whose hynotic and sinister presence haunts much of the narrative of Aurora Leigh. In 1845 Edgar Allen Poe published his story The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar, in which the narrator, P..., a mesmerist, aims to perform a hitherto unattempted experiment, the mesmerization of a dying man. The latter, one Valdemar, agrees to co-operate, is mesmerised at the point of death and enters an entranced state of suspension, in which he remains for several months. He is able to declare that he has in fact died. When the mesmerist eventually 'reawakens' Valdemar, the body at once assumes the condition it would have reached naturally, and immediately rots into "a nearly liquid mass of loathsome - of detestable putridity", ['The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar', Selected writings of Edgar Allen Poe, ed. Daniel Galloway (Penguin, London, 1967), p. 359].

It is evident that Elizabeth read Poe's story and was greatly disturbed by its gruesome theme. It seems that Poe admired her, a compliment which she apparently did not return, as a letter which she wrote to Browning on January 26, 1846, reveals; Elizabeth wrote that she had been sent:

> a most frightful extract from an American magazine... on the subject of mesmerism - the Mr. Edgar Poe who stands committed in it, is my dedicator ... so, while I am sending,

you shall have his poems with his mesmeric experience to decide whether the outrageous compliment to Elizabeth Barrett Barrett or the experiment on M. Vandeleur (Valdemar) goes furthest to prove him mad. [Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, ed. R.W.B. Browning (London, 1899), I, 431-32].

It would seem, therefore that Poe's memorable tale caused the name of Valdemar to be retained in Elizabeth's mind, later to emerge as the Lady 'Waldemar' of Aurora Leigh.

A further interesting coincidence is that Poe's fiancée, Sarah Helen Whitman, a poet, belonged to a spiritualist circle in America to which Harriet Beecher Stowe and her brother belonged (see Chapter Three, Note 9).

4) Plotinus (205-270 A.D) originated Neoplatonism, a philosophy showing obvious influences from Plato, Aristotle and Pythagoras. Plotinus aimed to lead men back to an awareness of an eventual union with that from which they and all things originated - the One or Good. This mystical notion required for its attainment great intellectual effort and moral purity.

The notion of the One, the Good, infers an ultimate being in the Christian concept of God, and Neoplatonism did indeed influence Christian theologians from the fourth century onward, as well as shaping certain aspects of the Renaissance, and of Islam.

5) Elizabeth's tone at this point of the poem is almost apologetic. In the opening line of the reference, she adds defensively to the credibility of those who testify to the reality of Spiritualism, by stating that they are both sane and truthful. In considering her attitude and the necessity for care in this sphere, she wrote to her sister Henrietta on July 9, 1856, referring to subjects that Henrietta had evidently suggested should not be

included in Aurora Leigh:

> No religion, no politics, no spirits!! add 'no bodies' - and you shut out my poor poem from most subjects in heaven and earth. Well - you may like some things in it - and that's all I can hope. There is one reference to the spirits, but nobody will be offended by it as Robert isn't! (Letters to her Sister, p. 250).

However restrained Elizabeth felt she had been in introducing Spiritualism into her poem, it is evident that others chose to see a more prominent role being played by the phenomenon in the writing of the work. Elizabeth wrote to Henrietta on January 10, 1857, of a conversation between herself and J. J. Jarves (see Chapter Two, Note 10):

> Mr. Jarves came to enquire very seriously the other day, whether there was any truth in the story going about Florence that 'Aurora' was written by the 'spirits', and that I disavowed any share in it except the mere mechanical holding of the pen!!! Think of that, (Letters to her Sister, p. 265).

Indeed, others only too clearly expected to see the influence of Spiritualism in the poem. Rossetti wrote to William Allingham on December 18, 1856, of Spiritualism: "Mrs. Browning has given in her adherance. I hope Aurora Leigh is not to be followed by that style only" [Letters of D. G. Rossetti to William Allingham, 1854-1870, ed. George B. Hill (London, 1897), p. 195].

6) This poem concerns the true history of the patriot-poet Laura Savio of Turin, one of whose sons was killed in the siege of Goeta, the last stronghold of the Neapolitan government, which the Italians had beseiged from November 1860 until it

capitulated to them in January 1861. Her other son died in the assault on the fortress of Ancona, which fell to the Italians in September 1860.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to explore and analyse the importance of Spiritualism in the life and work of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. It has been seen that Spiritualism was important to many individuals in the nineteenth century, of religious, scientific and philosophical interest. Many saw Spiritualism as a refuge from an increasingly materialist age, while others believed its 'revelations' to be a substantiation of their own religious convictions. In the case of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, it seems that she held deep and enduring faith in the validity of the phenomenon, a belief sometimes lacking in discrimination. It would seem that her interest in the subject probably originated in the deep distress which the deaths of those near to her caused her, especially that of her favourite brother, a tragic occurrence which involved on her part feelings of guilt and responsibility. The death of her father too, to whom she was never reconciled after her marriage to Browning, may have served to sustain her belief in Spiritualism in later years, with its 'revelations' concerning the possibility of survival after death and an eventual re-union on a spiritual plane between those who had known each other on this earth.

As far as the antipathetic attitude towards the phenomenon held by Browning is concerned, it is possible that his view-point may have been based upon moral, intellectual and religious objections to the subject. Especially virulent was his dislike of the medium D. D. Home, whom Elizabeth very largely considered valid in his mediumship. In Home, and in Spiritualism, Browning may have seen forces which threatened to dominate Elizabeth's mind in a similar way to the autocratic jurisdiction which her father had exercised over her, and from which Browning had, in a sense, released her.

While Browning expressed his antipathy towards Spiritualism in the antipathetic Mr. Sludge the Medium, Elizabeth's handling of the subject in her poetry is quite different. Indeed, such was her sensitive awareness of the very different light in which others regarded her spiritualistic interests, that the phenomenon is very rarely explicitly mentioned in her work. It is evident, however, that the exploration of subjects related to Spiritualism - death, immortality, the after-life, the human soul - is central to her creative work. Invariably death is introduced into her poetry whether it be in verses concerning the deaths of children, epics based upon classical warfare, or ballads set in medieval situations. In addition, such was Elizabeth's profound concern with the subject of death and bereavement, that these are frequently the inspiration behind her imagery; often she makes use of a symbol relating to the grave, the tomb, funerals or spiritual states and entities. From these themes and images it is possible to perceive certain aspects of her personal philosophy regarding death and the immortal spiritual existence: for her, great and good men achieve immortality in this world, by their positive activities in political, artistic and ideological spheres. It is clear that an eternal spiritual identity, too, is, for her, dependent upon the forces of positivism within the individual. The human soul comprises therefore, the creative and positive essence of human beings, their creation of beauty and response to it, their ability to convey love to others, and to receive it in return. It is this creative, positive quintessential element of humanity which, in Elizabeth's belief, survives bodily death to enter a new, spiritual existence. In that existence, the soul retains the individuality and personality which characterised it upon earth. The spiritual state is one of peace, but of transcendent ecstasy too. Normally the spiritual life is described in disappointing and sentimental terms, of angels robed in white and winged cherubs. At other times, however,

she explores more interesting ideas - the concept of a 'world-soul', the possibility of the individual being incorporated into the supreme universal spirit, following bodily death, in an experience of purgatorial explosive energy. However morbid Elizabeth's interest in death may seem now, though, however mystic she sometimes seems to become, and however sentimentally her concept of the after-life is invariably presented, it is nevertheless evident that all her spiritual speculation occurs within the liberating, enlightening and positive context of the loving and sustaining Creator, God.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Unless otherwise stated, London is the place of publication.

I Works by, or concerning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning

Armstrong, Isabel (ed). Robert Browning (1974).

Berdoe, Edward. The Browning Cyclopaedia (1891).

Blackburn, Thomas. Robert Browning, a study of his poetry (1967).

Browning, Elizabeth Barrett. Complete Works, ed. Charlotte Porter and Helen A. Clarke (New York, 1900; reprinted 1973), six vols.

Browning, Elizabeth Barrett. Letters, ed. F. G.Kenyon (1897), two vols.

Browning, Elizabeth Barrett. Unpublished Letters to Hugh Stuart Boyd, ed. Barbara P. McCarthy (New Haven, 1955).

Browning, Elizabeth Barrett. Letters to Richard Hengist Horne, ed. S. R. Townshend Mayer (1877), two vols.

Browning, Elizabeth Barrett. Unpublished Letters to Mary Russell Mitford ed. Betty Miller (1954).

Browning, Elizabeth Barrett. Letters to her Sister, 1846-59, ed. Leonard Huxley (1929).

Browning, Elizabeth Barrett. 'New Letters from Mrs. Browning to Isa Blagden', ed. Edward C. McAleer, Publications of the Modern Lanugage Association of America, LXVI, 594-612 (University of Tennessee, 1951).

Browning, Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning. Twenty-two unpublished Letters addressed to Henrietta and Arabella Moulton Barrett (New York, 1971).

Browning, Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Letters 1845-6, ed. Elvan Kintner (Belknap, Harvard University, 1969).

Browning, Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Letters 1845-6, ed. R.W.B. Browning (1899), two vols.

Browning, Robert. Browning to His American Friends; Letters between the Brownings, the Storys and J. R. Lowell, 1841-90, ed. Gertrude Reese Hudson (New York, 1965).

Browning, Robert. Dearest Isa, Robert Browning's Letters to Isa Blagden, ed. Edward C. McAleer (Austin, Texas, 1951).

Browning, Robert. Poetical Works, 1833-64, ed. Ian Jack (1970).

Browning, Robert. Robert Browning and Julia Wedgwood, a Broken friendship as revealed in their letters, ed. Richard Curle (1937).

Burdett, Osbert. The Brownings (1928).

Chesterton, G.K. Robert Browning (1903).

Clarke, Isabel C. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, a Portrait (1935).

De Vane, W.C. A. Browning Handbook (1937).

Drew, Philip. The Poetry of Browning: A Critical Introduction (1970).

Flowers, Betty S. Browning and the Modern Tradition (1976).

Grindley, Roy E. Browning (1972).

Griffin, W. Hall. The Life of Robert Browning (1938).

Halliday, F. E. Robert Browning, his life and work (1975).

Harrold, W. E. The Variance and the Unity, a study of the complement poems of Robert Browning (Ohio University, 1973).

Hayter, Alethea. Mrs. Browning, a Poet's work and its setting (1962).

Herford, C. H. Robert Browning (1905).

Hewlett, Dorothy. Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1952).

Honan, Park. Browning's Characters, a study in Poetic Technique (New Haven, Yale, 1961).

Ingram, John. Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1888).

Irvine, William, and Park Honan. The Book, the Ring, and the Poet, a Biography of Robert Browning (New York, 1974).

Jack, Ian. Browning's Major Poetry (1973).

Kenmore, Dallas. Ever a fighter, a modern approach to the work of Robert Browning (1952).

King, Roma A. The Focussing Artifice, the Poetry of Robert Browning (Ohio University, 1968).

Lubbock, Percy. Elizabeth Barrett Browning in her letters (1906).

Miller, Betty. Robert Browning, a Portrait (1952).

Orr, Mrs. Sutherland. A Handbook to Browning's Works (1910).

Peterson, William S. Interrogating the Oracle (Ohio University, 1969).

Phelps, William Lyon. Robert Browning, how to know him (1969).

Raymond, William O. The Infinite Moment, and other essays in Robert Browning (Toronto University, 1965).

Symons, Arthur. An Introduction to the Study of Browning (1906).

Taplin, Gardner B. The Life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1957).

Tracy, Clarence (ed). Browning's Mind and Art (1968).

Ward, Maisie. Robert Browning and his World (1969).

Whitla, William. The Central Truth, the Incarnation and Robert Browning's Poetry (Toronto University, 1963).

Willis, Irene C. Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1928).

II Works concerning the Brownings, Spiritualism, and 'Mr. Sludge the Medium'

Armstrong, Isabel. 'Browning's Mr. Sludge the Medium', Robert Browning, ed. P. Drew (1966).

Browning, R.W.B. 'Browning on Spiritualism', Times Literary Supplement December 5, 1902, 365.

Johnson, Edwin. 'On Mr. Sludge the Medium', Browning Society Papers, 1885-9 II, 13-32.

Merrifield, F. 'Browning on Spiritualism', Times Literary Supplement, November 28, 1902, 336.

Miller, Betty. 'The Séance at Ealing, a study in Memory and Imagination, Cornhill Magazine, CLIX, nos. 1009-1014, Autumn 1956- Winter 1957/8, 317-24.

Phelps, William Lyon. 'Robert Browning on Spiritualism', Yale Review, N.S. XXIII (1933), 129-35.

Porter, Katherine H. Through a Glass Darkly. Spiritualism in the Browning Circle (University of Kansas Press, 1958).

III Works by, or concerning, D. D. Home.

Burton, Jean. Heyday of a Wizard: Daniel Home the Medium (1948).

Dingwall, E.J. 'D.D. Home, Sorcerer of Kings', Some Human Oddities (1947).

Dunraven, Fourth Earl of (Windham Thomas Windham-Quinn). Experiences in Spiritualism with Mr. D. D. Home (c. 1870).

Home, D.D. Incidents in My Life (1864).

Home, D. D. Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism (1877).

Home, D. D. 'Mr. Robert Browning on Spiritualiam', The Spiritual Magazine, July 1, 1864, 310-17.

Home, Madame D.D. D.D. Home, his Life and Mission (1888).

Home, Madame D.D. The Gift of D. D. Home (1890).

Howitt, William. 'Some Séances with Mr. Home some years ago', Spiritual Magazine, Sept. 1872.

Inge, Rev. W. R. 'Mr. Sludge, the Medium', Evening Standard, August 29, 1944, 6.

Ross, Maris. The Man who Flew in the Window (1975).

White, W. An Evening with Mr. Home fifteen years ago (1870).

Wyndham, Horace. Mr. Sludge the Medium (1937).

IV Works concerning Spiritualism, the occult and the subject of Death.

Alexander, Patrick P. Spiritualism, a Narrative with a discourse (Edinburgh, 1871).

Anon. 'Modern Magic', All the Year Round, July 28, 1860.

Anon. Scepticism and Spiritualism (1865).

Ashburner, John. Notes and Studies in the Philosophy of Animal Magnetism and Spiritualism (1867).

Ashburner, John. On the connection between Mesmerism and Spiritualism (1859).

Baker, Mrs. E. An enquiry into the mystery of Spiritualism, with a narrative of personal experience (1862).

Ballou, Adin. Spirit Manifestations (1853).

Bamber, Mrs. Kelway. Claude's Book (1918).

Bamber, Mrs. Kelway. Claude's Second Book (1919).

Barrett, Sir William. On the Threshold of the Unseen (1917).

Blackmore, S.A. Spiritism, Facts and Frauds (1924).

Britten, Emma (née Hardinge). Art magic; or, Mundane, sub-Mundane and Super-Mundane Spiritism (1876).

Britten, Emma. The Creed of the Spirits (1873).

Britten, Emma. English Lyceum Manual; a compendium of exercises for the use of English Spiritualists' Societies (1887).

Britten, Emma. Ghost-land; or, researches into the mysteries of occultism (Boston, Mass. 1876).

Britten, Emma. Modern American Spiritualism (New York, 1870).

Britten, Emma. Nineteenth-century miracles; or, spirits and their work (Manchester, 1864).

Britten, Emma. 'Prove all things'; Spiritualism, with appendix containing rules for the spirit circle (1871).

Broad, C.D. Lectures on Psychical Research (1962).

Burr, H.S. Blueprint for Immortality (1972).

Carlisle, Rev. William. An Essay on Evil Spirits (1825).

Carpenter, W.B. Mesmerism and Spiritualism (New York, 1877).

Carrington, H. and J.R. Meader. Death: its causes and phenomena (1911).

Carrington, Hereward. Eusapia Palladino and her Phenomena (1909).

Carrington, Hereward. The Invisible World (1921).

Carrington, Hereward. The Physical Phenomena of Spiritualism (1907).

Carter, Huntley. Spiritualism, its present-day meaning (1920).

Crehan, Joseph. Spiritualism (1967).

Crokal, R. Intimations of Immortality (1965).

Crookes, Sir William. Experiments with Psychical Phenomena (1880).

Crookes, Sir William. Psychic force and modern Spiritualism (1871).

Crookes, Sir William. Psychic-power: Spirit-power, experimental investigations (1871).

Crookes, Sir William. Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism (1874).

Crowe, Catherine. The Night Side of Nature (1848).

Crowe, Catherine. Spiritualism and the Age we live in (1859).

Cruikshank, George. A Discovery concerning ghosts; with a rap at the spirit-rappers (1863).

Davenport, R.B. The Deathblow to Spiritualism (New York, 1888).

Davey, J.G. Report on Spiritualism (1871).

Davies, C.M. 'Something like a Séance', Belgravia, Sept. 1874, 350-56.

De Givry, Grillot. A Pictorial Anthology of Witchcraft, Magic and Alchemy, (New York, 1958).

De Morgan, Mrs. From Matter to Spirit (1863).

Dickens, Charles. 'Fallacies of Faith', All the Year Round, Sept. 1860.

Dickens, Charles. 'The ghost of the Cock-Lane Ghost', Household Words, Nov. 20, 1850.

Dickens, Charles. 'Latest Intelligence from Spirits', Household Words, June 30, 1855.

Dickens, Charles. 'This Spirit Business', Household Words, May 1850.

Dickens, Charles. 'Well Authenticated Rappings', Household Words, May 1855.

Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan. The Case for Spirit Photography, (1922).

Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan. The Edge of the Unknown (1930).

Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan. The History of Spiritualism (1926), two vols.

Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan. Pheneas Speaks; direct spirit communications (1927).

Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan. Spiritualism and Rationalism (1920).

Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan. The Spiritualists' Reader, a collection of spirit messages from many sources (1924).

Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan. Verbatim Report on a public debate on the Truth of Spiritualism (1920)

Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan. The Vital Message (1919).

Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan. The Wanderings of a Spiritualist (1921).

Drake, S. 'Though you die...' (1962).

Ducasse, C. J. The Belief in a Life after Death (Springfield, Illinois, 1961)

Duville, H.. Le Fantome des Vivantes (Paris, 1909).

Feifel, H. (ed). The Meaning of Death (New York, 1965).

Field, Kate. Planchette's Diary (New York, 1868).

Findlay, J. Arthur. Looking back, the autobiography of a spiritualist (1955).

Findlay, J. Arthur. On the edge of the etheric; being an investigation of psychic phenomena (1931).

Findlay, J. Arthur. The Rock of Truth, or Spiritualism (1933).

Findlay, J. Arthur. The Way of Life; a guide to the etheric world (1953).

Findlay, J. Arthur. Where Two Worlds meet; the verbatim record of a series of nineteen séances with J.C. Sloan (1951).

Fitzsimons, F.W. Opening the Psychic Door (1933).

Flew, A (ed). Body, Mind and Death (New York, 1964).

Fodor, Nandor. Encyclopoedia of Psychic Science (1934).

Fodor, Nandor. The Story of the Poltergeist down the centuries (1953).

Ford, A. The Life beyond death (1972).

Fournier d'Albe, E. E. Life of Sir William Crookes (1923).

Fournier d'Albe, E. E. Light on Immortality (1908).

Freer, Miss Goodrich. Essays in Psychical Research (1899)

Garrett, E. Adventures in the Supernormal (New York, 1959).

Gearon, D.J. Spiritism, its failure (1931).

Grant, T. A Scientific View of Modern Spiritualism (1872).

Gray, I. From Materialization to Healing (1972).

Green, C. 'Out-of-the-body-experiences', Proceedings of the Institute of Psychophysical Research (1968).

Guppy, Samuel. Mary Jane; or, Spiritualism chemically explained (1863).

Hall, Trevor C. The Spiritualists (1926).

Henslow, G. Truths of Spiritualism (1919)

Heredia, C. M. Spiritism and Common-sense (1922).

Heysinger, I.W. Spirit and Matter (1910).

Hill, Christina. Mesmerism and the Literature of the Nineteenth Century (unpublished M.A. thesis, Birmingham University, 1975).

Houghton, Georgina. Chronicles of the Photographs of Spiritual beings and phenomena (1882).

Houghton, Georgina. Evenings at home in Spiritual Séance (1881).

Howitt, William. The History of Magic (trans. 1854).

Howitt, William. A History of the Supernatural in all Ages and Nations (1863).

Hyslop, James. Contact with the Other World (New York, 1919).

Hyslop, James. Life after Death (1919).

Hyslop, James. Psychical Research and the Resurrection (1908).

Hyslop, James. Psychical Research and Survival (1913).

Jurgenson, F. 'Discovery of Voice Phenomenon', The Psychic Researcher, Oct. 1973.

Kardec, A. The Medium's Book (1971).

Keel, J.A. Our Haunted Planet (1971).

Koestler, A. The Invisible Writing (1954).

Kutscher, A.H. (ed.) Death and Bereavment (Springfield, Illinois, 1969).

Lawton, George. The Drama of Life after Death; a study of the Spiritualist Religion (1933).

Lee, Rev. F.G. Glimpses of the Supernatural (1875), two vols.

Leonard, Gladys O. My Life in Two Worlds (1931).

Leonard, John C. The Higher Spiritualism (1927).

Lepicier, Cardinal. The Unseen World (1929).

Lewis, C.S. A Grief Observed (1961).

Liljenkrants, J. Spiritism and Religion (1918).

Lodge, Sir Oliver. Man and the Universe (1908).

Lodge, Sir Oliver. Raymond; or life and death, with examples of evidence for survival (1916).

Mackay, Charles. Popular Delusions (1841).

Manley, G. In Personal Communication (1963).

Marryat, Florence. There is no Death (1892).

Meek, G.W., and B. Harris. From Séance to Science (1973).

Moses, W.S. Spirit Teachings (1898).

Myers, F.W.H. Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death (1903).

Myers, F.W.H. Science and a Future Life (1893).

Newton, Crosland. Apparitions, a new theory (1856).

Newton, Crosland, Mrs. Light in the valley: my experiences of Spiritualism (1857)

O'Neil, H.V. Spiritualism (1944).

Owen, G. and V. Sims. Science and the Spook (1971).

Owen, Robert Dale. The Debatable Land between this World and the Next (1871).

Owen, Robert Dale. Footfalls on the boundary of another World (1860).

Paget, Lady. Colloquies with an unseen friend (1907).

Pearce-Higgins, J.D. (ed.) Life, Death and Psychical Research (1973).

Pearsall, Robert. The Table-Rappers (1972).

Phillips, Philip and Sybil. Is Death the End? (1972).

Podmore, Frank. Apparitions and Thought-transference (1894).

Podmore, Frank. Modern Spiritualism (1902), two vols.

Podmore, Frank. Newer Spiritualism (1910).

Podmore, Frank. Studies in Psychical Research (1897).

Powell, A.E. The Etheric Double (1969).

Price, Harry. Fifty Years of Psychic Research (1948).

Price, Harry. Poltergeist over England (1945).

Pryce, C.E. and C.F. Ross. Post-mortem Appearances (1963).

Purchas, T. The Spiritual Adventures of a Business Man (1929).

Raupert, J. Godfrey. Modern Spiritism (1904).

Robertson, James. The Rise and Progress of Modern Spiritualism (1893).

Roll, W.G. The Poltergeist (New York, 1973).

Rymer, J.S. Spirit Manifestations (1857).

Salter, W.H. The Evidence of Psychical Research concerning Survival (1961).

Sargent, Epes. Planchette, or the despair of Science (Boston, Mass. 1869).

Sears, E.H. Foregleams of Immortality (1858).

Sheargold, R.K. Hints on receiving the voice phenomenon (Gerrards Cross, Bucks., 1973).

Sidgwick, E.M. Phantoms of the Living (New York, 1962).

Simpson, J.H. Twenty-two different photographs of the 'Katie King' series (1903).

Spicer, Henry. Sights and Sounds (1853).

Sully, James. Illusions (1881).

Swedenborg, Emmanuel. A Treatise concerning Heaven and Hell (1784).

Symonds, Arthur. Spiritual Adventures (1905).

Tappin, Cora L.V. Discourses through the Mediumship of Cora L.V. Tappin (1874).

Theobald, Morrell. Spirit-workers in the home circle (1887).

Thurston, H. Modern Spiritualism (1928).

Townshend, Rev. Chauncey Hare. Mesmerism Proved True (1864).

Toynbee, A. (Ed.) Man's Concern with Death (1968).

Tuckett, Ivor L. L. Evidence for the Supernatural (1911).

Underhill, Leah. The Missing Link (New York, 1885).

Wallace, Dr. Alfred Russell. Scientific Aspects of the Supernatural (1866).

Walsh, J.J. Spiritualism a Fake (1925).

Warner, W.L. The Living and the Dead (Yale, 1959).

Watson, Lyall. The Romeo Error (1974).

Waton, Lyall. Supernature (1973).

Weatherley, Lionel A. The Supernatural? (1891).

Wills, W.J. 'At home with the spirits', All the Year Round, Feb. 1866.

Winter, A. The Moment of Death (Springfield, Illinois, 1969).

Wolff, Robert Lee. Strange Stories and other explorations in Victorian Fiction (Boston, Mass. 1971).

V General

Allingham, William. Diary, ed. Geoffrey Grigson (1967).

Bible, The Revised Standard Version (1968).

Blake, William. Songs of Innocence and of Experience, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (1970).

Bright, John. Diaries, ed. Philip Bright (1930).

Brontë, Charlotte. Jane Eyre (1847).

Brooke, Stopford. Life and Letters, ed. Laurence Pearsall Jacks (1917), two vols.

Bulwer-Lytton, Sir E. A Strange Story (1862).

Bulwer-Lytton, Sir E. Zanoni (1842).

Burke's Peerage, Baronetage and Knightage, ed. L.G. Pine (1959).

Burrand, Sir Francis. Records and Reminiscences (1904), two vols.

Chambers Biographical Dictionary (Edinburgh, 1974) two vols.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. Works, ed. F. N. Robinson (1957).

Chesterton, G.K. All Things Considered (1908).

Cobbe, Frances Power. Italics (1864).

Coleridge, S. T. Poetical Works of, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (1969).

Cook, E.T. The Life of John Ruskin (1911), two vols.

Crowe, Catharine. Lilly Dawson (1847).

Crowe, Catharine. Susan Hopley (1841).

Dickens, Sir Henry. Recollections (1934).

Dictionary of American Biography, ed. Dumas Malone (1933), twenty-two vols.

Dictionary of National Biography, ed. Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee (1917), twenty vols.

Donne, John. Complete Poetry, ed. J. Shawcross (New York, 1968).

Doughty, Oswald. A Victorian Romantic, D. G. Rossetti, (1949).

Eliot, George. Adam Bede (1859).

Encyclopoedia of Poetry and Poetics, ed. Alex Preminger (1965).

Evans, Joan. John Ruskin (1954).

Everyman, (c. 1495).

Gaskell, Mrs. E.C. Ruth (1853).

Gaunt, William. The Pre-Raphaelite Dream (1943).

Hardy, Thomas. Tess of the D'Urbevilles (1891).

Harlan, Aurelia Brooks. Owen Meredith, a critical biography of Robert, First Earl of Lytton (Columbia University, 1946).

Hart, James D. Oxford Companion to American Literature (1965).

Hawthorne, Julian. Memoirs, ed. Edith G. Hawthorne (New York, 1938).

Hawthorne, Julian. Nathaniel Hawthorne and his Wife, a biography (1885), two vols.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. The English Notebooks, ed. Randall Stewart (New York, 1941).

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. The House of the Seven Gables (1851, Everyman edition, 1968).

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. Passages from the French and Italian Notebooks (1871), two vols.

Hawthorne, Mrs. Sophia A. Notes in England and Italy (1869).

Hillard, George S. Six Months in Italy (Boston, Mass. 1853), two vols.

Hyamson, Albert A. Dictionary of Universal Biography (1951).

James, Henry. William Wetmore Story and his friends from Letters, Diaries and Recollections (1903).

Keats, John. The Poems of, ed. Miriam Allott (1970).

Landon, Laetitia. Castruccio Castracani (1837).

Landon, Laetitia. Ethel Churchill (1837).

Layard, G.S. Mrs. Lynn Linton, her Life, Letters and Opinions (1901).

Leopold, R. W. Robert Dale Owen, a biography (Harvard, 1940).

Longfellow, Henry W. Life, with extracts from his journals, and correspondenc ed. Samuel Longfellow (1886), three vols.

Longfellow, Samuel. Memoir and Letters, ed. J. May (Boston and New York, 1894).

Lytton, Robert, First Earl of Lytton. Life, Letters and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton (1883), two vols.

Lytton, Robert. Letters from Owen Meredith to Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, ed. Aurelia Brooks Harlan and J. Lee Harlan (Waco, 1937).

Lytton, Robert, First Earl of Lytton. Personal and Literary Letters, ed. Lady Betty Balfour (1906), two vols.

Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett (from the Mahatmas M and K.H), ed. A.T. Barker (1926).

Martineau, Harriet. Autobiography (Boston, Mass. 1877), two vols.

Martineau, Harriet, and H.G. Atkinson. Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development (1851).

Oliphant, Margaret Oliphant W. Memoir of the Life of Laurence Oliphant and of Alice Oliphant, his Wife (1891), two vols.

Osgood, Samuel. 'American Artists in Italy', Harpers New Monthly Magazine, XLI, Aug. 1870.

Oxford Companion to Classical Literature, ed. Sir Paul Harvey (1951).

Phillips, L.B. Dictionary of Biographical Reference (1871).

Phillips, Mary E. Reminiscences of W. W. Story, together with an account of his principal works in literature and sculpture (Chicago and New York, 1897).

Podmore, Frank. Robert Owen, a biography (1906), two vols.

Poe, Edgar Allen. Selected Writings, ed. David Galloway (Penguin, 1967). a

Powers, Ellen. 'Recollections of my Father', The Vermonter, XII, March 1907, 79-85).

Ritchie, Anne. Records of Tennyson, Ruskin and Browning (1892).

Rossetti, D.G. His Family Letters, ed. W.M. Rossetti (1895), two vols.

Rossetti, D.G. Letters, ed. O. Doughty and J.R. Wahl (1967)four vols.

Rossetti, D.G. Letters to William Allingham, 1854-70, ed. G.B. Hill (1897).

Ruskin, John. Works, ed. E. T. Cook and Alex Wedderburn (1909), thirty-nine vols.

Shakespeare, William. King Lear (c. 1605-6).

Shakespeare, William. Love's Labour's Lost (c. 1594-5).

Sitwell, Sir Osbert. Left Hand, Right Hand! (1946).

de Stael, Madame A.L.G. Corinne (1807).

Steegmuller, Francis. The Two Lives of J.J. Jarves (New Haven, Yale, 1951).

Stevenson, Lionel. The Showman of Vanity Fair (1947).

Story, W. W. Conversations in a Studio (Cambridge, Mass., 1890).

Stowe, C.E. Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe, compiled from her Letters and Journals (1889).

Stowe, H.B. 'Correspondence of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, ed. Hazel Harrod, University of Texas Studies in English, XXVII (1948), 28-34.

Sue, Eugene. Mysteres de Paris (1842).

Tennyson, Alfred. The Poems of, ed. Christopher Ricks (1972).

Tennyson, Alfred. Tennyson and his friends, ed. Hallam Lord Tennyson (1911).

Tennyson, Charles. Alfred Tennyson (1949).

Tennyson, Charles. Six Tennyson Essays (1954).

Tennyson, Frederick K. Letters to, ed. Hugh J. Schonfield (1930).

Tennyson, Hallam Lord. Alfred Lord Tennyson, a Memoir (1897) two vols.

Thackeray, W.M. Letters and Private Papers, ed. G.N. Ray (1946), four vols.

Trollope, Frances. Domestic Manners of the Americans (1932).

Trollope, Frances. Widow Barnaby (1838).

Trollope, Frances E. F. Trollope: Her Life and Literary Work from George III to Victoria (1895), two vols.

Trollope, T.A. 'Some Recollections of Hiram Powers', Lippincotts Magazine VI, Feb. 1875, 206-13.

Trollope, T.A. What I Remember (1887), two vols.

Wagenknecht, Edward. Longfellow, a full-length portrait (1955).

Webster's Biographical Dictionary (Springfield, Mass., 1972).

Westwood, Thomas. Chronicle of the Compleat Angler (1864).

Whately, Richard. Life and Correspondence, ed. E. Jane Whately (1868), two vols.

Whately, Richard. Miscellaneous Remains from the Common-Place Book, ed. E. Jane Whately (1864).

Williamson, George C. Bryan's Dictionary of Painters and Engravers (1909), five vols.

Women Novelists of Queen Victoria's Reign, a book of appreciations by Mrs. Oliphant, Mrs. Lynn Linton, Mrs. Alexander etc. (1897).

Wordsworth, William. Poetical Works, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (1969).